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Fairy guardians

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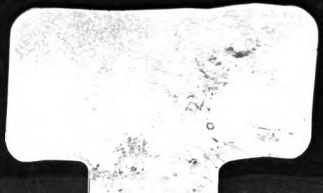

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FAIRY GUARDIANS.

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FAIRY GUARDIANS.

BY

F. WILLOUGHBY.

ILLUSTRATED BY TOWNLEY GREEN.

London:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1875.

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WHAT HAPPENED FIRST.

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FAIRY GUARDIANS.

WHAT HAPPENED FIRST.

"We figure to ourselves
The thing we like, and then we build it up
As chance will have it, on the rock or sand;
For thought is tired of wandering o'er the world."

—*H. Taylor.*

A GROUP of six children were standing on the brink of a pretty little stream that danced merrily over its pebbles until it was lost to sight in a thick wood. Near the children was a large open space of beautiful velvety grass, and behind were low rocks covered with wild flowers, and forming a boundary to the forest-trees beyond. The soft, warm air was filled with the scent of honeysuckle and other sweet-smelling flowers.

As to the young people themselves, they had the

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appearance of being somewhat puzzled, and by no means entirely happy.

Violet, the eldest, a tall, slender, dark-eyed girl, was evidently delivering an impressive rebuke to her younger sister, a small person, whose grey eyes were looking wistfully, even imploringly, at the indignant face of her elder. A schoolboy brother stood by with the broadest of grins on his good-natured face —but we would fain hope that seeing his stately eldest sister in a "fix" had nothing to do with his present delight.

The other three children consisted of a rosy-cheeked girl, with a thick mane of fair hair, whose naturally merry face was now occupied by various conflicting expressions — bewilderment, amusement, and, it may be, just a shade of fear.

Lastly came two little ones, a boy as dark as any gipsy, and a girl, as fair as he was dark, whose large blue eyes were opened to their widest extent.

"I repeat, Nina, it is *most* provoking. All this would never have happened but for your absurd belief in Fairyland."

Nina evidently felt guilty, for she meekly replied: "Well, you know, as you never would believe, I could not help wishing to convince you; but really and truly I never expected we should be all brought here like this. It isn't my fault, indeed!"

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"It matters very little what you *did* or did *not* expect," said Violet, with much severity; "all I want to know is, what is to become of us now we are in this ridiculous position?"

"I'm sure the Fairies will——" began poor Nina, when she suddenly stopped, and Violet's rather straight little nose, which had been turned up in contempt, turned down again abruptly, for both became at the same moment aware of the presence of a very handsome Fay, who, cap in hand, stood bowing low before Violet.

He really was such a splendid fellow, though little more than a foot in height. He had hair of the blackest, a pair of wonderfully expressive dark eyes, finely-chiselled features — an interesting melancholy pervading them—and a small black moustache that was simply perfect. He was dressed in a close-fitting suit of bright green velvet, while the hilt of his sword and the clasp which fastened the long white plume in his cap were of single diamonds. That in his cap was of peculiar brilliance, and was graven with some device or sign. Altogether, he was certainly something more than could be met with every day, and in a clear, distinct voice he addressed the astonished Violet:

"Deeply, O fairest maiden, do I regret that you so little appreciate Fairy power, and especially that

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you may doubt my personal devotion, now and ever, in your service. Earnestly I hope to be able to prove, not only this, but the universal good-will of the Fairy race towards you and yours."

Now Violet, though exceedingly disgusted with her present position, as tending to upset all her previous convictions, was a ladylike girl, and, therefore, felt she must reply civilly.

"I thank you for your kind expression of good-will, and I know, of course, that our being here is not your fault, but that of my sister, Nina."

Here she directed a withering glance at that young delinquent, who, feeling bolder in the presence of the handsome Fay, was not as much quelled by it as she was intended to be. The Fay again addressed Violet:

"Ah, fair maid! and can you really regret your position? Look round you at this lovely woodland scene—feel the sweet summer air, laden with the breath of a thousand flowers!"

"Yes, I admit it is all very pretty; but what is to become of us, and how do you suppose papa and mamma will feel when they find us gone? For my part, I certainly had no choice. I went to bed as usual, woke to hear a murmur of voices in my ears, light hands closing my eyes, a sort of sensation of floating through the air, and when I was at last

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allowed to open my eyes—I found we were all standing here!"

"Well," observed the schoolboy, "you needn't make such a jaw about it; the same thing happened to all of us, and *I* think it's awfully jolly."

"You, of course, never think of giving a moment's consideration to papa and mamma, Harry!"

"Permit me," interrupted the Fay, "to set your minds at rest on that point. When you were conveyed here, Fairy doubles were left in your places, who will appear, and act, and feel just as you would do. No mortal will tell the difference, and all will go on as usual."

The look of unmitigated contempt which overspread Violet's face at the idea of any Fairy double being able to fill *her* place satisfactorily so alarmed the courteous Fay, that he hastily added:

"Pray believe that your being here can give pain to none, while it will be the source of untold delight to many. Only express a wish, and I will instantly see that it is carried out, though, so long as you remain here—on this spot—my power will be controlled by the precise wording of your request."

Violet was an eminently practical young person, with no useless romance about her, so she replied promptly:

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"I should be glad to know how long we shall be obliged to stay here?"

"Among the Fairies you are to remain for a year and a day; but not in this spot, unless you prefer it. At the expiration of that time you will have the choice of returning to your mortal life, or remaining for ever Fairies in Fairyland."

Violet gave a sort of gasp; the audacity of this speech took her breath away. Not only was her time coolly disposed of for a whole year—she did not condescend to count the day—but she had actually lived to hear it supposed that she might possibly wish to be a Fairy! It was very hard! She looked round at her brothers and sisters, but derived no comfort—they all appeared aggravatingly pleased—and Harry was even executing a furtive *pas de joie*, with his hands well down in his pockets; so it was with the resigned air of a martyr that she turned to the Fay, who, kneeling before her, exclaimed:

"I entreat you, give me the pleasure of serving you!"

Then did Violet's practical nature assert itself. She was helpless, and therefore wisely resolved to make the best of it. Her reply to the Fay's appeal was:

"Be good enough to stand up properly," (she was nearly adding, "or you will catch rheumatism," but

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stopped in time) so she continued: "Since, for some incomprehensible reason, we are to remain here so long a time, we shall require a suitable house, and I am particularly fond of a good garden, and——"

But here amazement checked her speech, for, even as she spoke, the low grey rocks changed into an exquisite, tiny house, garlanded with creepers, and through the open windows could be seen the elegant little rooms within. The open space became a lovely garden, full of exquisite birds and flowers of every hue, with graceful fountains here and there. But all was in miniature—the house itself not being more than five feet high—not so tall as Violet herself, who craned over her long neck and stared down the skylight without any difficulty. A general rush was made to the little dwelling, and shrieks of delight were elicited by the sight of the pretty things it contained.

"Oh, there's *such* a drawing-room! All over white and gold and blue—I never saw anything so lovely!" cried Beatrice, the second girl.

"And, I say! there's no end of jolly things in the kitchen," shouted Harry.

"Oh! oh!! *oh!!!* Do come and look at the bed-rooms—they are delicious!" cried Nina, dancing with delight. "Only see, Violet, here's yours, because it's all violets and white lace—so it must

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be for you; and there's a little room next to it all over lilies, so that's for baby Lily, of course—and, oh dear! here are two more, pink and blue, roses and forget-me-nots—blue for you, Beatrice, and pink for me! Oh, it's *too* lovely!"

Now Violet could not possibly help a look of delight when she inspected the various beauties of the residence created by her wish. Justice required that the oracle should speak, and she accordingly said: "It is certainly very beautiful; but then, you must admit, it is quite useless—not one of us can possibly get into it, and what is the use of a house one can't get into?"

"I told you, fair lady, that, while here, I could only fulfil wishes as you express them."

"Then, naturally—I wish to be the proper size for that house."

Scarcely were the words uttered than there was a smothered shriek, a heap of brown velveteen lay on the ground, and Violet had disappeared! Much commotion might be observed in the centre of the heap, which the Fay regarded with the deepest anxiety. At length a faint voice was heard to exclaim:

"Oh, *dear* me! I shall be killed! What *is* the matter? There are great, cold, heavy things, like tongs, falling on to me! What on earth are tongs

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falling about for?—they hurt dreadfully—do help me —somebody!"

"They are only your hair-pins, sweetest lady, and they *must* be all out now. You know I can only do as you request. Do you wish to come out?"

"No, *certainly* not! How dare you ask me when you know my things are all gone wrong! Oh! there's another! They can't be hair-pins! Oh dear! how I wish my clothes fitted!"

In an instant the heap of brown velveteen shrank, and there stood Violet quite complete, only she was now scarcely one foot in height. Very wide open indeed became the eyes of her brothers and sisters as the Fay, with a low bow, offered his arm and led her into the house, where she presently appeared in the drawing-room, seated in a blue satin arm-chair, and talking to the Fay as if nothing particular had happened. This was more than Beatrice could endure in silence, so, lying flat down, to enable her to obtain a good view of the interior, she observed:

"Look here; I call it downright unfair that you should be made to fit while we don't. Tell that little swell—by-the-by, what is your name? One can't go on calling you the 'green man,' it sounds as if you were a public-house, you know."

"My name is Mossiefern," replied the Fay.

"Well, then, Mossiefern (what a very queer name,

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to be sure), do make us fit, too, there's a good-natured old thing!"

Whether this friendly speech entirely pleased the Fay or not is doubtful, for he replied in a somewhat severe tone:

"I serve Violet, and her only," bowing to her as he spoke; "but if you will look about you, instead of staring in here in that most inelegant attitude, you will see that our most gracious sovereign lady Queen Titania has provided a suitable attendant for each of you."

And sure enough, as Beatrice turned round, she saw another Fay standing, cap in hand, close by her. He had a beautiful fair face, and was dressed in light blue thickly embroidered with silver, while on his shoulders was folded a pair of gauzy wings. He, too, wore the graven diamond as a clasp for the plume in his cap. Nina was not left out, for by her was a third Fay, younger than the other two. His dress was a pale rose colour, and the gem in his cap, though bearing the same device, was a pearl. Beatrice's Fay told her that his name was Ariel, and that of Nina's Aquarillo.

Dancing on a spray of honeysuckle, close by Harry's head, was a bewitching little Fairy; and as she was a Fairy, her dress was rather odd, consisting almost entirely of red and gold, while her

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curly black hair was surmounted by a diadem of flashing rubies and gold. But the jewels did not dazzle Harry's sight half as much as the radiance of the merry dark eyes she fixed on him. In one moment poor Harry's heart was taken captive, and his last remaining objections to Fairy dominion vanished as snow before the sun.

"*I'm* to take care of *you*," said the little lady, giving herself an extra dance on the bough as she spoke, "and a nice time I expect to have of it! My name's Calorica; what's yours?"

"Harry," murmured that smitten youth, who was of that age when standing speechless with the mouth wide open discloses volumes of hidden feeling.

"Harry, ah! that's a nice easy name to call, which is more than mine is. But then you're a boy, and a little trouble is good for boys, you know."

The little being floated down from the branch, and, warned by Violet's sad fate, Beatrice, Nina, and Harry prudently wished themselves the right size, clothes and all, and were speedily rushing in and out of all the rooms of the pretty cottage, wild with joy, and closely followed by their Fairy guardians.

While all this was going on, two beautiful Fairy children, with crowns of flowers on their heads, had tripped up to the little ones, Geoffrey and Lily, greeting them with loving kisses. At their touch the

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mortal children became of Fairy size, and hand in hand they found their way to a wonderful play-room, where the four were soon busily employed in turning out its treasures, besides making themselves equally sticky and happy with Fairy sweetmeats, warranted never to make anybody ill.

They played together quite happily and merrily, for at their age few embarrassments occur, and Lily domineered over her small Fay in truly feminine style, while her brother rejoiced under the comparatively mild rule of his little Fairy playmate: for Geoffrey's mortal life had been an experience of considerable tyranny on the part of his diminutive but strong-minded sister, Lily.

Meanwhile Violet and Mossiefern had been quietly discussing matters in the drawing-room, and Violet had come to the conclusion (not altogether as reluctantly as might have been expected) that it would be no loss of dignity, under the circumstances, to try and enjoy Fairy life as much as possible.

"Do you have proper day and night here?" inquired she, condescendingly.

"Oh, yes; just like the mortal world—not that this is the real Fairyland. None of mortal nature, except children, can enter our own true kingdom."

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Violet felt, of course, that she was ineligible for admission under these circumstances, and, therefore, continued:

"Where are we now, then?"

"In a land laid down on no mortal map, nor ever seen by human eyes, save by permission of the Fairy Queen—a happy land, wherein are no storms, no cold, no dangers, and no grief."

Violet pondered silently on this statement with great gravity, and her eyes wore a sort of dreamy look, which suddenly gave way to an expression of indignant horror, as she started from her seat, and rushed out of the window, exclaiming:

"It cannot be—yes, it is! Good gracious!! Mossiefern, Beatrice is FLYING!!! Come down this moment! I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself!"

Mossiefern, who, much startled, had followed the direction of Violet's eyes, beheld the cause of her just indignation.

Flying over the nearest tree-tops, and evidently enjoying it, for peals of merry laughter rang constantly through the air, were Beatrice and Ariel. Not in the least disturbed at the certainty of an unusual display of ankles—so to speak—was that young lady's mind.

She had wished for wings, and was quite prepared

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to make the most of them. She had seemingly just had the best of it in a race with a decidedly stout and elderly blackbird, who, besides being exceedingly astonished, felt compelled to keep his eye on his extraordinary adversary, and had therefore to fly sideways at great disadvantage. Certainly, there was Beatrice, poised on her pretty fluttering wings just over the laurel-bush in which the insulted blackbird had taken refuge, puffing and staring; for besides the shock to his nervous system, he was alarmed about his digestion, having recently dined heartily on some unusually fine blue-bottles. This sort of thing was very likely to disagree with him, and he knew what Mrs. Blackbird's temper would be if he required her attention before the eggs were hatched.

But Violet neither saw nor thought of this, and dashing over the lawn she called in her most impressive voice:

"Beatrice, I desire you to settle at once!"

Violet used the word "settle" unwillingly, but she could think of no other appropriate one, though it certainly did sound odd when applied to a sister.

Slowly poor Beatrice descended, and stood obediently with her wings neatly folded, remarking, however:

"Well, as I *have* wings, I don't see why I should not use them; and as for my petticoats, which I

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know you're thinking of, you see there are only birds and butterflies up there, and *they* don't mind."

During this speech Violet was looking extremely puzzled. She greatly wished to set Beatrice right, and yet it was very difficult to take in all the rights and wrongs of this most unusual case—a winged sister. For she always wished to be thoroughly just, and she felt that to attempt justice with no known grounds to go upon was not an easy responsibility. While still considering this knotty question, Nina ran out of the house, calling:

"Oh, do come in! Supper is ready, and you can't think how pretty it all is!"

"Supper!" exclaimed Violet; "why it surely cannot be so late as that!"

"In this land," replied Mossiefern, night succeeds day almost instantly. See—even now the sun is sinking."

And Violet saw the western clouds flush deepest crimson, then golden, green, and purple, while just as the glorious colours were fading, the large clear moon rose over the tree-tops, more brilliant than that of the mortal world, and flooded the quiet woodland with her silver light. Glow-worms shone out upon the grass, fire-flies sparkled among the trees and flowers, while Violet, with a sigh, as if the sight of so much loveliness made her sad, turned, and silently entered the house.

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Here it was evident that the rest had not been idle. The supper was laid in a large tent, lit with many-coloured lamps. Banks of beautiful flowers were arranged round the room, and the table was bright with elegant silver and glass—well laden, too, with every kind of delicacy. Large silver goblets were placed for every guest, and apparently filled with something good, for there was nothing to be seen of Harry's round face save a mere rim round a partially-inverted goblet, very like an annular eclipse of the sun. Soon the whole party were doing justice to a most excellent supper, and when they had eaten all they possibly could, they tried the crackers. Very wonderful crackers these certainly were. First Violet pulled one with Mossiefern; as it exploded a delicious perfume filled the air, and Violet was also conscious of a succession of small sharp sounds proceeding from it. There was certainly something alive inside! Most carefully she unfolded the gelatine paper, and out jumped the tiniest little white poodle! He rushed round and round Violet's plate, barking and capering, while her face flushed with delighted surprise.

"Oh, what a sweet little thing. Like Lulu that I had at home, so I will call him Lulu. But he really *is* a dog, isn't he, Mossiefern? He won't die, will he?"

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Mossiefern assured her that he was quite genuine, and that she would find his health and spirits most satisfactory, advising her to try his powers on a bit of chicken; and certainly no mortal dog could have made it disappear in a more rapid or real manner.

Then Beatrice pulled her cracker with Ariel, and out flew, singing, as surely none but a Fairy bird *could* sing, a little robin! He perched on Beatrice's finger and carolled forth his most joyous melody, his little wings drooping from the excitement of his own music. Beatrice exclaimed:

"Oh, Ariel! it's no end of a little darling! But how can it sing like that?—no robin does, you know."

"All these crackers were specially prepared by Her Majesty's private confectioner, and I have no doubt this is one of the trained songsters of the Royal aviary, where each bird has learnt the notes of every known warbler."

Then came Nina's turn, and out of her cracker waddled a white swan.

"Put him in your finger-glass," suggested Aquarillo, and when once on his most becoming element he sailed gracefully round, curving his elegant neck to pick up the bits of cake with which his delighted mistress fed him.

Lastly came little fat Lily's turn, and out of her

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cracker ran two lovely white rabbits with pink eyes. Well for them was it that they were no ordinary animals, for Lily instantly seized the unlucky little wretches in her arms, hugging and kissing them to an extent that must inevitably have strangled them had they only possessed the tenacity of mortal rabbit life.

The two boys gave their crackers to their Fairies, who, however, found nothing more wonderful than superlative chocolate creams inside them. Before very long sundry pairs of eyes began to look sleepy, and Lily dropped fairly off, her head resting on the shoulder of her boy, Fayel, who sat as still as a mouse for fear of disturbing her. So Violet took her upstairs in her arms, undressed, and laid her down in the little white bed of the lily room, while Geoffrey most carefully tucked himself up in bed in another chamber close by. Just as the two children were dozing off to sleep, their little companions stole softly in, and after kissing them lovingly, floated out of the window and were nowhere to be seen. So when Violet went down again she asked Mossiefern what had become of them, and he answered:

"They will sleep among the flowers nearest the children's rooms, ready to go to them at the slightest notice; and we also," added he, "must bid you goodnight; but we shall remain within hearing of your faintest call."

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Violet replied prosaically, that she was extremely obliged to him, but felt sure they would not require anything during the night. Each Fay then took leave of his lady, kneeling and kissing her hand, and Calorica insisted on Harry's paying her the same deference, which he only accomplished with tolerable grace, not being used to the style of thing at all.

Then the mortal children went to their respective bed-rooms, though Violet lingered long at her open window, drinking in the warm, scented air, and looking over the still, moonlit scene. Then she prepared for bed, and had just curled herself up comfortably and closed her eyes when she heard strains of the softest, sweetest music.

Lulu, who had been put to bed in a small box with jeweller's cotton, gave one inquiring bark and then laid himself quietly down to sleep again, while Violet recognised Mossiefern's clear voice singing the following serenade:

"Maiden, sleep! may sweetest dreams
Hover round thee through the night,
Bright o'erhead the pale moon gleams,
Thou—thou only art my light!
Rest, maiden fair!

Watch o'er thee I'll fondly keep,
From each sound to guard thine ear,
Ah! that in thy slumber deep
Thou would'st dream thy Fay is near!
Rest, maiden fair!"

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"Well," murmured Violet, in the drowsiest way, "what a very absurd young man that must be! How can he suppose it possible to go to sleep while he is making that noise? And the grass must be damp, too . . . and he'll catch a dreadful cold . . . and sneeze . . . I hate people to sneeze . . . makes one jump so . . . goloshes, . . . no, of course he won't have a pair . . . so foolish . . . I . . . "

But here Violet's sleepy voice ceased altogether, and she was off as sound as a top; while Mossiefern, his day's task done, lay down to rest on some scattered rose-leaves close under his lady's window.

Up in the morning early were the children, and pleasant were the greetings between them and their friends, and all the pets were found to be in excellent health and spirits.

Breakfast was duly arranged by Nina and Harry, whose lady, Calorica, assisted wonderfully by her superior knowledge of sundry Fairy dishes. When all this was over, Calorica cried:

"Why shouldn't we play at dressing up?"

This proposal was received with immense applause, and the children tried every costume they could think of, for of course a costume was no sooner described and wished for than it was ready to put on. The elder girls tried all kinds of interesting historical characters, and were deeply engaged in discussion

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thereupon, when suddenly Lily presented herself in a most elaborate Parisian costume, and with the most self-satisfied air and manner. Shouts of derisive laughter greeted her appearance, and Harry called "Hulloa, peacock!" at the top of his voice.

Lily's vanity was dreadfully wounded, as she had quite intended to impress the others with her splendour. She looked just on the point of crying, when Fayel whispered, "Never mind, *I* think it's awfully pretty; but if they don't like it you can take it off, and they won't tease any more!"

So poor Lily, with a very bad grace, wished herself into a much simpler costume, and retired to gather flowers by herself until she felt her temper restored again.

Geoffrey rejoiced in attire of a piratical and brigand character, and was hardly visible from the numbers of toy pistols, swords, and daggers stuck about him in all directions.

Then he took to a little amateur carpentering, and constructed an ingenious kennel for Lulu, with a front door and a knocker, which that ungrateful dog declined even to enter.

So happily and contentedly passed three lovely summer days and nights. Fresh wishes were hourly formed and hourly gratified, yet, after all, child-like, they wished for something different. They received

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without trouble or delay everything they could possibly desire, and still they all longed for an entire change in some way. Harry was heard to remark that he found it "jolly enough—but slow!" Beatrice declared that she "really must do something or go somewhere." Violet openly said she should like to see more of the world; and even Nina was seized with a travelling fit, though, as a rule, she was the most lazy little person possible.

So they all assembled in solemn council, and after much discussion, it was decided that each couple should go off on their own devices, and that at the end of the year and a day they should re-assemble in the fairy garden, and finally decide as to their future.

"Though, of course," said Violet, "there is no doubt what MY choice will be. Nina is certainly the only one who is likely to remain."

There seemed but one objection to this pleasant scheme, for, as Violet truly observed, the two little ones were neither old enough to travel, nor to be left alone in the house. Then little Fayel stood forth and said:

"You forget that young children are permitted to enter into the heart of Fairyland, and no sights or pleasures that you will enjoy can equal those of our wondrous country. Safe from harm and sorrow, our

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mortal charges will enjoy, for the appointed time, all the untroubled happiness of Fairyland."

Violet was at first considerably astonished at so grown-up a speech from such a small boy, but she reflected that probably Fairy intellects were capable of very rapid development, and that if Fayel really were so sensible, he might be safely intrusted with the charge of Lily. She consulted Mossiefern, who assured her she need have no fear. The small lady herself, on being appealed to, declared her perfect willingness to remain with Fayel, and was heard to remark that "then she could do just as she liked, without being teazed," which was understood to be an allusion to the unlucky Parisian toilette.

Violet then summoned Geoffrey, who was gathering grapes with Elfine, and having had the whole state of the case explained, he said he should very much like to stay with Elfine, and would take great care of her.

The idea that she, although a Fairy, could take care of *him*, was rejected with scorn.

So it was finally settled, and the pets also were to be left in the charge of the children. Mossiefern assured Violet that when she and her brother and sisters felt sufficient confidence in their guardians to trust themselves entirely to them, they could leave this spot, where their power was but limited, and then they

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would be able to provide unasked for their comfort and amusement.

Violet, consenting, watched the four little ones pass, hand in hand, out of sight—for mortal eyes may never behold the entrance into Fairyland.

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FIRST JOURNEY.

VIOLET AND MOSSIEFERN.

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SPRING.

"Waiting for Spring! the hearts of men are watching,
Each for some better, brighter, fairer thing:
Each ear a distant sound most sweet is catching,
A herald of the beauty of his Spring!"—*Alexander.*

BEATRICE and Ariel were already nearly out of sight, flying over the highest tree-tops; Nina and Aquarillo had embarked in a little boat and were floating down the stream; Harry and Calorica had disappeared in the thickest part of the forest; Violet and Mossiefern remained alone.

"Lady mine," at length inquired he, "what do you wish to do? What part of the mortal world do you first propose to visit?"

"I think I should like to see our world where spring, summer, autumn, and winter are fairest —I want to see the seasons in perfection, with the human life that belongs to them. Can this be done?"

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"Most certainly it can, since you will trust yourself entirely to me."

Poor Violet's determination to make the best of everything was speedily put to a very severe test, for, answering the call of Mossiefern's little silver whistle, a large white owl descended close by her.

"Mount without fear, sweet maiden! On my honour you will be perfectly safe, and there is no other way of performing the long journeys we must make without fatiguing you. So soon as you are mounted I will send you into a magic sleep, from which you will awake, rested and refreshed, at our first destination."

Violet felt for just one moment a strong inclination to refuse; but she valiantly overcame it, possibly assisted by the reflection that none of her brothers and sisters remained to witness her proceedings—so entirely at variance with what she usually approved of. Gently and tenderly Mossiefern placed her between the great wings of the owl, where the snowy feathers made a most luxurious resting-place, and even before the bird rose in the air the Fay had waved her off into a deep sleep.

She woke again at the sound of his voice, and, to her unspeakable astonishment, her remarkable steed had alighted with her on the top of a high hill, and Mossiefern placed her on the grass—grass greener

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and more velvety than she had ever seen on earth before. Beneath and around her lay the loveliest expanse of sea and land that she had ever beheld. Before them, sparkling in the golden sunlight, stretched a magnificent bay, with snowy sails dotted on its surface, and bounded out at sea, in the blue distance, by a grand promontory. Far to the left were the outlines of a range of rugged hills; away to the extreme right Violet could see a distant city, while behind them stretched a plain clothed with the richest vegetation. Close by some children were watching a flock of sheep and goats, and such a wealth of spring flowers blossomed at their feet! Truly the scene, far and near, was one of unequalled loveliness. Violet could not speak for the first few moments, and then said softly:

"Where are we? What is this lovely land?"

"We are in Ireland," replied Mossiefern, "a country noted for loyal belief in our race, and surely, also, the land where spring is fairest. Yet now, as the day is about to close, I shall beg you to remount, for I would fain take you among those distant hills," pointing, as he spoke, to the wild outlines, now standing out clearly defined against the darkening sky. "I should wish to introduce you to some of my own race who live there in one of the loveliest of glens."

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Oh! for Violet's past assertions and convictions! She had been travelling for an unknown number of hours on the back of a white owl, and now she could not bring her mind to uttering a remonstrance openly against the (to her) decided indignity of being regularly presented to any members of the race she held in such light estimation. Before she had time, however, to arrange her ideas fully, she found herself replaced on the owl, while the bird, spreading her strong wings, sailed swiftly and steadily over the land, and Violet, not having her eyes shut this time, felt terribly scared at first, and clutched tightly hold of the poor owl's feathers.

After a little time, however, the perfectly easy motion reassured her, and she had at last time to admire the tract of rich green pasture-land over which they were passing, with here and there herds of lazy-looking cattle going home for the night. She also wondered how Mossiefern managed to float along by her side when he had no wings. Soon the scenery became more rugged, and just as the moon rose in full splendour they entered a wild, beautiful glen, whose craggy sides rose to a great height. Half way up them, however, grew shrubs and small trees in profusion; they were just in full leaf, and wore that soft, tender green never seen after spring-time.

A mountain torrent rushed down the glen from a

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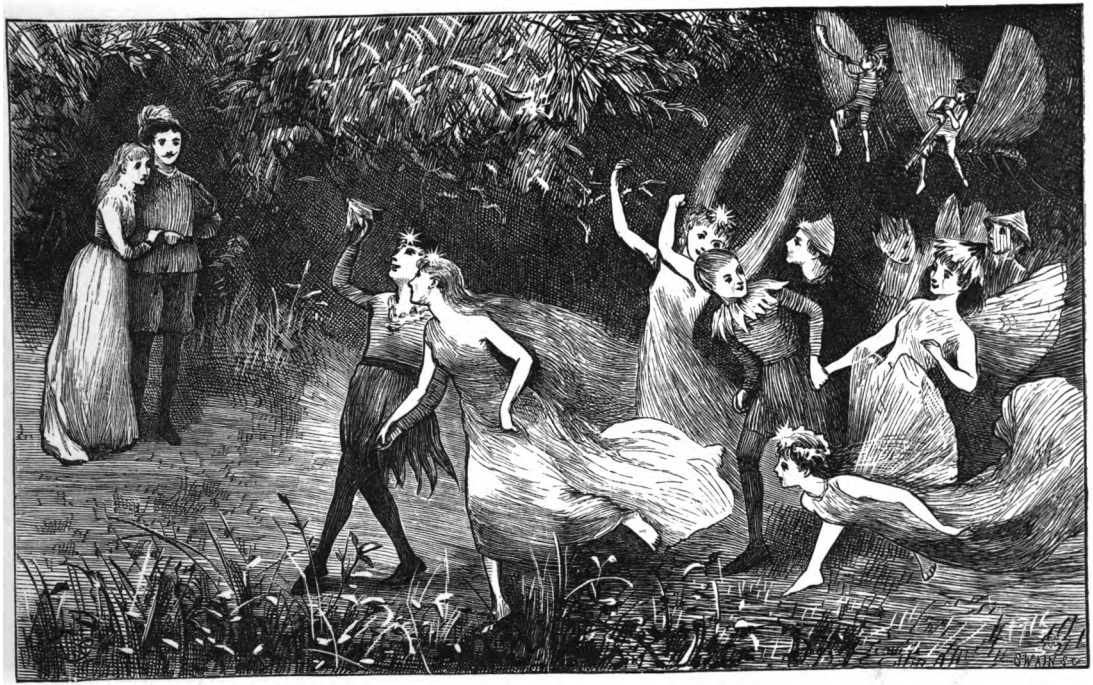

A FAIRY TROUPE. (*p.* 33.)

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rocky chasm at the upper end, and spreading itself into a sheet of lacy foam splashed and shimmered in the moonlight, overhung on either bank with willows and water-weeds.

Mossiefern assisted Violet to dismount, and they went forward on foot. Soon she heard sounds of low, sweet music, and, at a sign from Mossiefern, she stood quite still. From under an arbutus bush trooped forth a band of lovely little beings, on the head of each shone a tiny star, and all were of the most exquisite form and movement. Overhead flew the musicians, borne on the backs of the largest and strongest night-moths, and minute as the instruments were, the high crags echoed and re-echoed the clear strains of Elfin minstrelsy.

After some fifty Fairies had passed close by Violet, Mossiefern made her another sign, and, following him, they entered a circular space of beautiful, soft, green grass, surrounded by wild flowers—bluebells, anemones, primroses, and many other kinds of which Violet did not even know the names. There were hundreds of glow-worms hanging in the bells of the flowers, and though these alone would have given enough light for the dancers, they had also the full radiance of the moon, which shone straight on the dewy grass, making it look as if sprinkled with the brightest diamonds. Many elderly Fairies were to be

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seen enjoying tea out of acorn cups (and possibly not a little gossip with it) ensconced comfortably on cushions of soft green moss, while high on a conspicuous throne of gold-coloured fungus, at the foot of a noble beech tree, sat one who was evidently the Elfin chief.

He wore a close-fitting green suit, something like Mossiefern's, and literally blazed with emeralds. He was certainly some very important personage, for he issued his directions right and left in most regal style.

Suddenly the Elfin music burst into strains of triumphant welcome, for Mossiefern had led Violet into the moonlit space, and all became at once aware of their presence. Down sprang the glittering Elf from his fungus throne, and knelt before Mossiefern, bare-headed. But before he had time to utter a single syllable, Mossiefern, who had coloured deeply at the sudden obeisance, motioned him peremptorily to rise, with an air of great annoyance and impatience.

"But, your Roy——" began the Elfin-chief.

"Silence!" said Mossiefern, angrily, though in a low voice. "This is not the first occasion on which I have had reason to complain of your want of discretion!"

Then, turning to Violet, he gravely presented her to—

"Tripaway, Sub-commissioner of the Woods and Forests, of which I am chief."

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It was evident that amazement was a sensation capable of being brought to great perfection in Elfin nature, for poor Tripaway's eyes looked as if they could never again resume their natural size. He stared wildly at Mossiefern, backed up against the other elves, stumbled over cobwebs, and conducted himself in a generally reckless manner. Finally, when Mossiefern, placing Violet on the fungus throne, took a lower seat by her side, his bewilderment had reached its highest point, though he continued bereft of speech. Then came forward a stout, elderly Fairy, apparently his better half, who, poking him in the back with her fan, to insure his attention, remarked:

"I'm perfectly ashamed of you! But it's just like you to stand gaping there, as if you hadn't wits enough to find out that two and two make four! Why, it's as plain as—as—well, as *you* are—that our Prince is over head and ears in love with this mortal maiden, and if you value your appointment, and don't want a decrease in your salary (which, with two daughters still on hand, isn't to be thought of), you'd better go this moment and offer your congratulations."

Thus adjured, the hapless Tripaway attempted to expostulate. "My dear! I don't think that would do at all! He doesn't seem to wish his rank acknowledged—perhaps he thinks his Royal mother wouldn't——"

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"His Royal fiddle-sticks!" cried his wife, disrespectfully. "Do you suppose he would let the Queen interfere with his love affairs? Besides, I've no doubt she approves of it. Why not?"

Without waiting for Tripaway's reply, she took the matter into her own hands, and going up to the throne fell on her plump knees and commenced:

"Permit me to offer, O noble Pr——" but no farther went her speech, for again Mossiefern coloured to his very temples, his dark eyes flashed angrily, and casting one anxious glance at Violet's puzzled face, he hastily rose, and, taking Tripaway aside, exclaimed:

"Do tell that idiot of a wife of yours to hold her tongue! Can you not see that I wish my rank kept secret? I despatched an express grasshopper to warn you of this last night. Is it possible that he is not yet arrived?"

"Most certainly I have received no instructions from your Roy—ahem! Those young grasshoppers never *do* come when they're wanted! They *will* stop to play leap-frog with all the dirty, vulgar crickets they can find; one even went so far as to play marbles with a tadpole! They are so shockingly low in their tastes! In fact, I have to-day drawn up an official report, which I was about to forward to your Roy—I mean—that is to say—to you,

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containing the petition of a most worthy and influential inhabitant of our glen, against the employment of grasshoppers as Queen's messengers. The person lodging the complaint is a most respectable beetle, residing close by. It is hardly credible, but the last two grasshoppers sent here with despatches attacked him at his own house and at his own dinner-table, turned him over on his back, covered him over with the table-cloth, and sat on him, like a sofa, while they finished his dinner! And so they left him, quite helpless—it might have been the death of him! For I assure your Royal Hi—oh, dear me! I beg pardon—that if by the merest chance I had not dropped in and rescued him he would have died of suffocation. It would be a sad pity if anything were to happen to him, for he keeps the very finest cigars—gets them from some Spanish cousins, I believe."

"Yes, yes," said Mossiefern, "I will attend to all this another time. At present remember that I have dropped my title, and am an ordinary woodland Fay, like yourself."

Tripaway promised obedience to the wishes of his master, and, as he retired, his wife instantly seized his arm and began:

"Well! our Prince has certainly lost his manners! Did he tell you all about it? Who is she? Why is it a secret? When is the wedding to come off?"

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"His very first words, my dear Bluette, were, 'Tell that'—well, he said I was to request you not to reveal his rank, and as he didn't say a word about a marriage, I think, my love, it would be better if you dismissed that idea from your mind."

"Ah," replied she, with a sniff of contempt, "that may be all very well for you; but I'll get to the truth of it somehow. Perhaps his Royal Ma doesn't know of it yet, after all! Dear, dear! these young men are all alike, even the best of them deeper than wells! But he's the eldest and favourite son, so the Queen is sure to consent to anything he wishes—so, Tripaway, it's my belief we're entertaining our future Queen."

"Well, it may be so," answered Tripaway, who was well aware of the uselessness of opposing any of his wife's opinions; "all we've got to do, at any rate, is to obey the Prince's wishes, and keep our mouths shut, for if we don't it will be the worse for us, and no mistake!"

"Thank goodness, at any rate," retorted she, "he won't make me keep my eyes shut! And I *can* see an inch before my nose—which is more than you seem equal to, my man!"

Here Bluette, after darting a contemptuous look at her lord and master, went up to Violet, and inquired, with a low courtesy, if she would be pleased

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to take any refreshment, and if the dancing should recommence. Violet assenting to both suggestions the graceful Fairy-ring was formed again, and turning, twining, and gliding, with the most fantastic elegance, the Elves moved swiftly round in the silver moonlight, while the merry music woke the echoes far and near. Tripaway offered, on bended knee, an anemone-bell filled with Elfin champagne, while a little boy (certainly Bluette's son, for she had been observed to give him anxious injunctions to "put down his bow and arrows, like a good child, and behave nicely to the pretty young lady") presented a golden buttercup full of delicious cakes. But the moon was sinking now, and Mossiefern told her that the Elves would retire to the flower-bells with the earliest streak of dawn, adding that, as she must be very tired, Bluette would at once show her to a suitable sleeping-chamber.

Accordingly Violet, who had gladly consented to this arrangement, was conducted by Bluette with a most important air to a large birch tree. At a light tap, a door in the white shining bark flew open and disclosed a lovely little circular chamber in the hollow of the trunk. It was hung round with curtains of white silk and the bed was of delicately carved ivory. The windows were long and narrow, being glazed with the wings of dragon-flies; but as the moonlight

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came but very faintly through, the room was amply lighted by a circle of brilliant fire-flies round the toilette-glass, which shed a soft rosy glow over all. The bath was of one pink-lined shell, and altogether Violet felt there was really nothing left to wish for. Bluette, smiling and bowing, then withdrew, after showing a small silver bell, one sound on which would summon her instantly. The silken curtains and invisible door closed after her, and the weary girl was soon sleeping as soundly as if she had never had an adventure in her life.

Bluette did not go straight home to her husband (they lived on a pleasant bank of primroses), but made some investigations by the way, the result of which she imparted to Tripaway before she allowed him to rest in peace and quiet.

"Tripaway, listen to me," said she, giving him a shake; "what do you suppose the hawk-moth has just told me?"

Tripaway's muttered reply bore a painful resemblance to "Hang the hawk-moth!" but Bluette affected not to hear.

"*Now*, perhaps, you'll condescend to believe me! That mortal maiden travelled here on one of the royal white owls—and every baby in Elfdom knows that they are only used for conveying members of the Queen's family."

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"Bless me!" ejaculated Tripaway, slightly roused by the information; "why, then, the Queen *must* know and approve of it! Dear, dear — it's very odd!"

"Of course she must; though she wouldn't approve of that sweet Prince sitting up on a bough all night, keeping watch over his lady's door, and nothing to shelter him but his little round mantle. Mark my words, that girl is to be our young Queen, and don't you go and say I never told you so!"

And then, to Tripaway's great relief, she went to sleep.

Greatly surprised was Violet, when she awoke and threw open her dragon-fly windows, to find that the sun seemed to have been long up, for the air felt perfectly warm and balmy. She dressed in a hurry, and summoned Bluette, who told her it was already somewhat late in the mortal day.

"But then I've been up nearly all night," thought she to herself, "and that's quite a good reason for being so late."

Mossiefern saluted her with his usual graceful dignity, and led her to where a most elegant Fairy breakfast was spread on the soft green moss. He was so attentive to her every want as to inspire Bluette to give several nudges and whispered, "I told you so!" to her husband, who had seemingly not

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quite recovered his presence of mind, for he frequently scratched his head in a puzzled and meditative manner.

Just as they were rising from their meal they heard sounds of approaching voices, and Bluette exclaimed:

"There now! We haven't been disturbed before this season with those nasty, meddling tourists! To think of their choosing this day, of all others, to come disturbing your ladyship!"

Mossiefern, however, said, with a smile, that he thought Violet would be amused at seeing and hearing mortals from her new position.

The party coming down the path consisted of a lady and gentleman, a guide, and two pleasant-looking girls, about ten and twelve years of age. When the guide pointed out the pretty, open glade, the younger child exclaimed:

"Oh, mamma, mamma! look at the Fairy-ring! It is so distinct! They must have been dancing here last night—and what a lovely place it is for them!"

"Really, Eva," said her elder sister, severely, "you are always talking as if you really believed in Fairies, and you know quite well there are no such things."

Violet, hidden among the bluebells, felt herself blushing—for was not that just the spirit in which

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she had always spoken until so short a time ago?—and she certainly never should have thought that mortals could look such great, coarse, clumsy things! Her eyes and thoughts were fast becoming accustomed to the delicate proportions of Fairy life.

When the strangers had again left the glen to its usual quiet solitude—quiet, that is, save for the joyous song of birds in every tree and bush—Mossiefern asked Violet if she would like to see something of the human life around them, and she, willingly consenting, the owl was summoned, and she was borne away to a very different scene.

She awoke on a wild, lonely sea-shore, and where Mossiefern had lifted her off the owl was a sandy shell-strewn beach. Close behind and on either side rugged cliffs rose almost perpendicularly to an immense height, while at their base were great piles of broken rocks. Very grand was the outline of this iron-bound coast, but woe betide any hapless vessel that needed shelter on such a pitiless shore! The sun was hidden behind banks of angry-looking clouds, and the wind was beginning to make a low moaning sound among the crags.

The only living thing in sight was a pretty, dark-haired girl, leaning against a boulder, and looking anxiously at the gathering clouds, while her face wore an expression of deep sadness. She was

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evidently wife or daughter of a fisherman, from her dress and the half-finished net that lay on the ground unheeded. Violet was touched by the sorrowful, weary face, and said to Mossiefern:

"What is her trouble? Why is she looking so anxiously out to sea?"

He answered, "Because her husband is out with his fishing-boat—she knows the signs of a coming storm—and her little child lies at the point of death."

"Oh, please let me go to it," cried Violet, always tender where babies were concerned. So Mossiefern led her into the hut, built at the foot of the cliff, and it seemed indeed a comfortless place, with only an earthen floor, and the ceiling and walls were black with years of peat-smoke, though wherever it was possible there were signs of care and cleanliness.

The baby lay in a little cradle, so wan, and pale, and thin, that Violet straightway asserted her mortal nature by bursting into tears. She felt Mossiefern's hand rest gently on her head as she watched the troubled sleep of the little one.

"Oh, Mossiefern, it is such a poor little pet! It must not die! Please do help it—what can be done?"

He gently waved his hand over the baby's face, and even as he did so the little features seemed to become less pinched and drawn, and the tiny chest

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heaved less heavily. The mother entering saw the change, and exclaimed:

"Ah, but I am thankful! the darling's sleeping easier! Oh if she may but live—for oh, my child, my child! it would be a bitter thing to give you back to the angels!"

Mossiefern turned to a shelf where stood a little empty bottle and a small spoon—there had seemingly been some medicine for the baby—and from a golden phial he poured a few drops into the bottle. Then the mother turned, and Violet could scarcely credit that she could not see them. But she only sighed wearily, murmuring:

"Ah, Dermot, but it will be a cruel night! I hear the wind rising every minute, and you'll never be able to get in until the daylight comes again—and I with not a drop of stuff left for the baby!—and the doctor miles away over the hills! Ah, it's hard to bear—it's hard to bear!"

As she spoke she took the bottle in her hand, and with a cry of delight she noticed the few drops of liquid.

"My eyes must have played me false! Oh, how glad I am! Not half an hour ago I looked, and I was sure there was none left! Oh, my babe! it may be your little life that's saved!"

So saying, she carefully poured the few drops

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between the lips of the sleeping infant. In a very short time the pretty blue eyes opened, and, with a smile of recognition, the baby stretched out its arms to its mother.

"My darling! my own darling! she knows me again!" cried she, clasping her in her arms, and shedding tears of grateful joy. Very little did she guess of the help and sympathy so close at hand, for Violet was crying hard for company, and the baby—who, being a baby, could see her—gave her such a sweet, loving little smile that she was fain to kiss it tenderly. She had perched herself on the back of the chair in order to command a good view of her patient, and heard the mother whisper softly:

"Oh, Dermot! if I could only have you safe back this night, it's I would be happier than the Queen upon her throne!"

"Mossiefern," said Violet, decisively, "you must bring him here directly."

"But see, sweet maiden, how fast the storm is rising—even now the waves are crested with angry foam, and the clouds are driving wildly over the sky! We Fays of woodland may not control the Storm Spirits; nevertheless, your will is my law, and what *can* be done *shall* be done."

So saying he left the cottage and soared high into the air, and Violet strained her eyes to watch his

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progress. Soon she gave a start of fear, for, darting from the lurid clouds, came a dark and awful Form, bearing a gleaming spear aimed at Mossiefern's breast.

"Mossiefern! Mossiefern! oh, do come back! you will be killed!"

But amid the many noises of the rising storm, her weak voice could not reach her faithful Fay, so she could only look and look, until at last she beheld the Storm Fiend cowering low at Mossiefern's feet, and had she possessed Fairy instead of mortal senses, she would have heard the following words:

"You know this token," said the Fay, showing the graven jewel in his cap. "Beware my mother's vengeance if you disobey my wishes! Recall your fiends and allow that father to return in safety to his home."

Erect and dignified stood Mossiefern before the crouching form, as, with a howl of baffled rage, the Storm King darted back into the angry clouds from whence he came.

Down fell the rising waves, more softly blew the gusty wind, and Violet saw a little fishing-boat glide safely into the sandy cove near to that little cabin, which, humble as it was, had ever been to that rough fisherman the haven of rest, and hope, and love.

Violet gave Mossiefern a most grateful look,

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though she but tamely expressed her relief at having him once more safely beside her.

"But how did you subdue the terrible Storm Spirit? What made him obey you if, as you say, the woodland Fays have no power over him?"

During this speech Mossiefern looked uncomfortable, and hastily whistling for the owl, he remounted Violet, saying then, after a short pause:

"The knowledge that I had earned your thanks, fair maid, would urge me to attempt greater difficulties, and would make me gladly face more dangerous foes than the Storm Spirit. He is but a blustering bully, after all, and they are always cowards at heart."

Violet and her owl rose in the air, and she slept as usual. Mossiefern soon roused her, and looking down she saw that they were passing over a noble park. On the terrace of the grand-looking old mansion was a sweet young girl gazing wistfully over the broad landscape, now dimly seen in the gathering twilight. The owl flew very slowly, and Mossiefern said:

"That young girl is rich, and fair, and good; but she has not yet learnt the blessedness of doing good to others. There are many poor tenants on her father's broad lands to whom she could give help and comfort did the wish to do so exist in her heart. It is in your power to place it there."

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"Oh, how? I should so like to help her, she has such a soft sweet face."

Mossiefern placed a wand in Violet's hand and bade her touch the young girl's bosom and head. The owl carefully steadied its flight so that Violet easily accomplished her task, as the bird swooped down obediently, and the young girl's waving hair was stirred as by a passing breeze.

She raised her head, a new and beautiful light shining in her eyes, murmuring:

"What is that seems to bid me no longer lead this useless, idle life? How deeply I feel the wish to help and be of use to others! Yes, from this time some, at least, shall rejoice in my prosperity."

She remained silent, but with the light of the new and blessed resolution still on her face, as the owl's onward flight bore Violet away.

Mossiefern waved her off to sleep again, and it seemed as if in another moment she was safe in her pretty Fairy room, with Bluette bidding her good night and wishing her pleasant dreams. When she was alone she began to think over the events of the last day and night, and Mossiefern's share in them.

"I wish I really knew all about him. There's certainly something, but I don't like to ask Bluette, because, if he does not wish me to know, it would be dishonourable to try and find out."

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Verily, a great change had come over Violet, when she not only admitted feeling some curiosity about a member of the despised race, but even considered his wishes with as much delicacy as if he had been mortal.

The next day an entirely fresh idea occurred to Violet, and she asked "if she might be permitted to see the future?"

"If it do not concern yourself, you may," replied Mossiefern.

"Well—yes—no—I don't really know, I suppose it isn't myself really," said she, with a puzzled air, "it's about that double of mine." There was no mistaking the tone of utter contempt in which this was said. She continued, with a little hesitation, "I mean if I—it—I mean *she* is ever to be married, I should so much like to see the wedding—I've never seen one in all my life."

"That would make a suitable ending for a spring journey," answered Mossiefern, "for it ought to take place in the bright spring-time of a girl's life."

Vanishing for a few moments, he returned, and placed in her hands a small oval mirror of burnished silver. On this he breathed once lightly, and as the mist of his breath cleared away, Violet looked on the following picture:

The interior of a noble old country church,

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through whose stained-glass windows shone the glowing light of a sunny morning. Two clergymen in their surplices were waiting at the altar, as the bridal party entered, and the church was decked with flowers and filled with people in holiday dress. Violet, much excited, cried out:

"Oh, it's our dear old church at home! and there's the bride, and no—it cannot be—yes, it is—it's actually me! Do look at Beatrice in a long dress! Just fancy that, and mother—how nice she looks!—and oh, dear," cried she, in a final burst of interest, who can HE be—I must see!"

She bent eagerly forward to examine a group of gentlemen, one of whom came forward to meet the bride; but her breath so dimmed the mirror that she could no longer distinguish a single figure. Very much disgusted she drew back her head, and as the mirror slowly cleared, she recognised, with a cry of pleasure, in one of the officiating clergymen the dignified bearing and saint-like face of him who had held her in his arms at her baptism.

"Oh, that is as it should be! I am so glad that he should marry me—her, I mean," added Violet, in a vexed tone, "*she* can't feel properly about it—oh, they're going!"

Bride and bridegroom were leaving the church; but as he walked with his head bent, Violet could

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not see his face, and in her anxiety she put her face too near—her breath again obscured the mirror, and as it cleared away left only a brightly-polished surface reflecting her own eager countenance.

"It is *most* provoking," said she, with some asperity, "that you can't let me see who he is! It can't matter, as it isn't really me!"

"Therefore, as you say, it cannot matter," said Mossiefern, calmly. And Violet had to be satisfied, though she fancied she could still hear in the air the chiming of distant wedding-bells.

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SUMMER.

"Thousands are round us, toiling as we,
Living and loving, whose lot is to be
Passed and forgotten, like waves of the sea:
Be we content, then, to pass into shade,
And live in the light that our actions have made."

Dean Alford.

LITTLE did Violet guess how much real regret she felt when, at the beginning of the summer journey, she bade farewell to the Elves of the Irish glen; they had certainly been quite as interesting as human beings.

Their first stopping-place was a valley in Switzerland, and well, indeed, did Mossiefern choose the spots in which to show Violet the perfection of the seasons. Wild flowers grew everywhere in the greatest profusion; overhead was a sky like a sapphire, and against it rose the clear-cut outlines of a range of snowy mountains, closing in the lovely peaceful valley in an amphitheatre of eternal ice.

Peasants in picturesque costumes were moving to

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and fro in the village, where it was evident that some festival was about to take place, for the principal house was gaily decked with wreaths and flags, which were being arranged under the direction of a jolly-looking farmer. Presently he called out:

"Zelma, Zelma! art thou never coming? The rose-wreath for the porch is not half finished yet, and in another hour all must be ready. It is close on nine o'clock, child."

A very pretty girl came round from the garden, and the cause of her delay was tolerably apparent in the person of a handsome young peasant who had succeeded in stealing one of the lovely summer roses with which her apron was brimming over.

"Ah, fie! Claude; thou wilt soon regret teaching her to idle away her time like this! But, after all, I can't say much, since it is her last day of liberty."

This was said with an affectation of pity, but there was all the while a good-natured twinkle in the farmer's eye as he patted his daughter's shoulder.

"Now, Claude," said she, with a pretty air of authority, "go in and help my mother—you are only in the way here."

Claude obeyed with a very bad grace, and disappeared into the house. Then the burly farmer stooped down and kissed his child's soft cheek, whispering as he did so:

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"And we shall lose thee to-day, little Zelma—our first-born! thy mother and I shall miss thee sorely, pretty one!"

Tears gathered in Zelma's bright eyes, as, regardless of the fate of her roses, she clasped her father round the neck in an energetic hug, and he, seeing heart and eyes were full, said lightly:

"Come, come, we must to work—and in a little while we shall have the house gay enough to satisfy even so fanciful a bride as thou!"

"This is really such a pretty summer picture," said Violet; "but oh, Mossiefern, do let me give them something—to be a real Fairy gift, you know."

"But you are not a Fairy—*yet*," replied he, with a significant accent on the last word.

"Oh dear no, certainly not!—but you *are*, so that will do just as well."

With a little sigh Mossiefern asked her what she wished to give.

"I should like to wish three wishes for them—I know that is the usual thing." (To think of Violet's owning any knowledge of Fairy customs!) "And of course you will take care that they are properly carried out."

So Mossiefern led her into the great oak-raftered kitchen, where comfort and cleanliness reigned supreme. Stores of shining vessels of tin and copper

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were round the walls, and the long table was already laden with goodly preparations for the feast. In the centre stood the enormous wedding-cake, and by this Mossiefern placed Violet. She touched it, saying :

"May Zelma never know the want of food, nor ever grudge of her plenty to the poor. And may she and her husband live to prepare just such another wedding-cake for their own daughter."

Zelma's mother had just administered the finishing touches to the cake, and she and Claude had retired a few paces to contemplate the effect with unmixed satisfaction. Assuredly they would have been considerably astonished could they have heard the wish and seen the wisher.

Then Violet went up to the little white chamber in the sloping roof where all Zelma's finery lay ready to put on this happy day; and touching the wedding-dress, she said :

"May the heart that will so soon beat under this be ever warm and loving, may no harsh experiences ever chill it, and may all holy and gentle thoughts find a lasting home therein."

Then she touched the dainty little shoes, saying :

"And oh! may her feet tread ever in the path that leads to the only true happiness, and may erring fellow-creatures turn to follow in her steps, helped and guided by the bright, loving purity of her life!"

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"Wisely and sweetly chosen are your wishes, dearest maiden," whispered Mossiefern. "Rest assured they will bring forth good fruit. And now, come! for we have many a mile to travel yet."

Violet mounted her owl, and it seemed almost directly that Mossiefern awoke her in a very different scene. They were passing over a hill-side, so green and velvety as to remind her of the Irish glen. The air was heavy with the perfume of flowers, and the sun shone with a warmth belonging to no northern land. A girl and her dog sat idly gazing over a perfectly calm blue sea—not even a ripple was on its surface—and the picture was one of sunny, lazy content.

"Oh, how deliciously warm and pleasant! Where are we?"

"In Italy," replied Mossiefern. "It is truly a lovely, sunshiny land, and yet I would not change it for dear old England."

"Oh, then you are really an English Fay?" inquired Violet, as the owl, now flying very swiftly, bore her rapidly away.

"That indeed I am," answered he, proudly; "I am a direct descendant of the 'Faerie Queen,' of whom old Spenser sung."

Violet felt as if this certainly constituted a tie between them, and she began to consider that it was

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very odd how she had so long entirely ridiculed the existence of the Fairies, and soon her meditations took the form of dreamless sleep.

She was getting quite used to rapid changes of scenery, so she was not particularly surprised to find herself, on awaking, comfortably placed on a mossy bank, close beneath the ruins of what had once been a splendid castle, though now ivy and wild creepers garlanded the deserted walls. Magnificent trees grew all around, affording welcome shade from the blazing sun overhead.

Violet basked in the pleasant warmth, enjoying a silent reverie for a few minutes, and then demanded:

"Why is this fine old castle ruined and deserted, when there are such rich and beautiful lands all round it?"

"Because terrible deeds were done here in the old times—deeds so dreadful, even for this wild country (we are in Spain), that—the legend runs—this castle may never again be inhabited."

"Oh, if there is a legend about it, do tell it me!"

So Mossiefern laid himself down on the grass at her feet, in the shadow of the old tower, and thus commenced:

"Years and years ago, there was no more powerful noble in Spain than the owner of this castle. The bluest of blood ran in his veins, he had endless

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wealth, and it seemed as though he had no wish left ungratified. Yet there was one thing that all his wealth and power could not procure for him—he had no son. Only a daughter, a beautiful and gentle girl, on whom to rest all his ambition. He had arranged in his own mind that she should wed some Prince of Royal blood, and her children should keep up the old name and rank, so that people would not miss him when he was gathered to his fathers.

"So far well; but he had entirely left out of his calculations the possibility of his daughter, gentle as she was, having some ideas of her own on a subject so nearly concerning her happiness. Great, therefore, was his wrath, and fearful his threats of vengeance, when she quietly but firmly refused to receive as her future husband an individual selected by her father, and whom she had never yet seen.

"Her papa did what all sensible persons were in the habit of doing in those days—he promptly locked her up in a lonely tower, trusting that time would bring her to her senses. But love is frequently more than a match for despotic authority, and Doña Isidora had every night the consolation of a charming serenade from a devoted but unauthorised lover of her own choosing.

"But one unlucky day a mischievous little page informed the count of what was going on. So at

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midnight the old gentleman, having duly worked himself into a fearfully bad temper, sallied forth to catch Isidora's unconscious lover. Sure enough, when he got near the tower, he plainly heard the notes of a guitar.

"Humph! I'll soon put a stop to that absurd tinkling!" remarked he. And accordingly, before the young man had even time to play a wrong note, he was knocked down particularly flat, and thoroughly stunned. A shriek of anguish from an upper window indicated that poor Isidora had witnessed the whole proceeding, and it was with a chuckle of satisfaction that her stony-hearted parent shouldered the helpless form of the serenader. So the very last glimpse the lady ever had of her unfortunate lover was a fleeting vision of his red silk tights as they hung, limp and powerless, over the count's back, as he stalked triumphantly off with his captive."

"Oh!" cried Violet, in great excitement, "did he kill him?"

"Well, no—not exactly; but the shocking old villain shut him up in an awful dungeon, deep under the castle, in company with a remarkably unamiable lion."

"A lion! Where did he get one from?"

"Well, I believe he kept him on purpose, because, as people were in the habit of disappearing rather

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mysteriously, their relatives had insisted on searches being made for them throughout the castle, always quite ineffectually, the truth being that the lion was kept for the purpose on very short commons, so that the victims were always munched up to their last hair, and not a trace of them could, of course, ever be discovered."

"Please go on quickly—it's very dreadful!—did the lion really eat up the poor thing?"

"No; strange to say he did not. They struck up a friendship, and lived together quite sociably, until the happy event of the old count's death, when the lion was shot and the prisoner released."

"And then, of course, he married Isidora?"

"Well, no, he did not—for the very good reason that she had married somebody else."

"What a horrid faithless girl! And what did the poor dear young man do then?"

"Finding all this out, and hearing, moreover, that Isidora was perfectly happy and comfortable, he——"

"Committed suicide?" suggested Violet, anxiously.

"Oh dear no! nothing of the kind. He was a quiet young man of refined tastes, and fond of peace and comfort, so he entered a neighbouring monastery, where he spent his time in illuminating the lives of half the saints in the calendar. His works became quite celebrated, and his reputation for piety so noted

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that public opinion ran terribly against the old count, though, as he was dead, they had to content themselves with knocking his castle into ruins, as you see, and seizing the land for the benefit of the monastery.

"No one ever cared to attempt the restoration of the castle, for the ghosts of the old count and his lion are said to haunt it nightly."

"What a very interesting story," remarked Violet; "but I wish they had married each other all properly,—it was so dreadfully mean of Isidora not to wait."

"Now I really think she behaved in a singularly sensible manner! It is doubtful whether she knew that her lover was still alive, and it is certain she could not tell when the old count would die, so she is decidedly to be excused."

After the mention of the old count's spectre, Violet frankly asserted her disinclination to remaining much longer, and Mossiefern assured her, with a smile, that he would at once take her far enough away.

So she went into her usual deep sleep on the owl's back, and when she awoke, she was plainly in a very different land. Palm trees, and other kinds that Violet knew only belonged to the tropics, grew around, and they were festooned with flowers of every colour and perfume. Birds of the brightest plumage flashed in and out of the forest, whose

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deep shade was rendered even more mysterious-looking by the luxuriant growth of underwood. At a little distance the thick jungle ended, and a grassy bank sloped gently down to a broad stream, which flowed calmly along—a cool and pleasant sight amid the oppressive heat. Violet rightly guessed they were in India. The day was nearly done, and she saw a fine old man—a Brahmin, she felt sure—come slowly along the bank of the river.

She was admiring his noble features and dignified bearing, thinking how extraordinary it was that a man with so dark a skin could look such a thorough gentleman—when she suddenly uttered a shriek of terror and clung closely to Mossiefern. For on the old Brahmin's track, creeping noiselessly through the brushwood, came an enormous tiger. His long, lithe tail switched his striped sides impatiently—sure sign of an approaching charge, and his wicked green eyes gleamed savagely on his unconscious victim.

"Oh, Mossiefern, Mossiefern! save the old man!" cried Violet, in an agony of fear.

Quickly the Fay sprang forward, standing right in the tiger's path, between him and his intended prey. The savage beast had crouched for the final leap—but no sooner did he see Mossiefern than his whole aspect suddenly changed. His tail drooped, his head moved uneasily from side to side, unable to bear the

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steady gaze with which the Fay confronted him, and in another moment he rushed back into the jungle, cowed and vanquished.

"The old man is safe now," said Mossiefern, with a sigh of relief; "but he will never again be so near death until his last hour shall come."

Poor Violet's nerves were considerably upset by the very sensational character of this last adventure, and she observed, with some truth, that she did not see the sense of avoiding the ghost of a lion and encountering a live tiger instead. So she very willingly remounted her owl, and was greatly relieved on awaking to find herself within sight of the loveliest city she had ever beheld.

Mosque, and tower, and minaret, rose on every side from the calm surface of deep-blue water, while before her an arm of the waveless sea stretched away between steep hills covered with luxuriant vegetation, while the promontory on which they stood was adorned with graceful palaces of white marble, gleaming amidst the dark green of myrtle and orange-trees. Fragrance and beauty were everywhere, and it was truly a wondrous combination of city, sea, and verdure.

"This is lovelier than any place we have yet seen!" exclaimed Violet. "How beautiful this city looks! What is it?"

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"Constantinople," answered Mossiefern, "and you are looking over the far-famed Golden Horn, and between yonder green hill-sides winds the Bosphorus; opposite, where you see the great white building on the hill, is the spot I specially brought you here to visit. Just now you are standing in the grounds of the royal seraglio."

Violet turned to examine the nearest palace, built entirely of snowy marble, with slender pillars and doors of delicately-carved cedar-wood, and vases of flowers every here and there. Mossiefern led her in, and she was struck with the immense size and height of the rooms, whose alabaster walls and trellised shutters spoke of an eternal summer. She found the strong scent of cedar and sandal-wood (of which the wood-work entirely consisted) quite oppressive.

When she had wondered and admired enough, Mossiefern called the owl, and they floated gently over the water to the hill opposite, to which he had before called her attention. Violet amused herself during their passage by watching the graceful caïques darting about under them, and when they had arrived at their destination she marvelled much at what she saw.

Mossiefern had reverently taken off his cap, and round them lay many and many a grave. Most of them had white head-stones, but nearly all were

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neglected and overgrown with weeds. Only a very few seemed tenderly cared for. Violet read one or two of the head-stones, and then exclaimed:

"Oh, Mossiefern, they are English graves! And so young!—scarcely one even middle-aged! Whose are they?"

"This is Scutari, and on this quiet hill sleep many innocent victims to ambition. The joy and hope of many a heart lie buried here! Look at that great square building, that was the hospital, and its walls—could they speak—might tell many a tale of agony, of heroic endurance, of peaceful death-beds smoothed by gentle hands. All honour be to the band of devoted women who willingly left home and comfort to minister to the dire necessity of the suffering soldiers!"

"Thank you so much for bringing me here," said Violet, softly, "and before we go I should like to make these poor graves look pretty."

So she dexterously arranged the creepers and trimmed the too luxuriant flowers, so that strangers who came that day said how beautifully the graves were kept, little guessing that gentle Fairy hands had been diligently working there.

"And now," said Mossiefern, "we have done all we can here, so I will take you for a complete change of scene."

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When Violet next opened her eyes, they were beneath a group of date palms, growing on a little oasis, surrounded on every side by a boundless sandy desert. At their feet bubbled a tiny spring of water, but all around, as far as the eye could reach, the fierce sun blazed down on the desolate, lifeless sand. Not a cloud was in the sky and not a shadow on the surface of the parched and lonely plain.

"Well," observed Violet, "I certainly always *did* wish to see a desert, but I can't say I think it's cheerful. There seems nothing to do and nobody to help."

"Wait a little," answered Mossiefern, "there are very few places where Fairy wills and Fairy hands are useless. Even the midst of an Arabian desert can furnish good employment."

Mossiefern pointed to the right, where, in the distance, Violet saw the tall form of an Arab, motionless, shading his eyes with his hands, and gazing intently in their direction.

Then he turned, and mounting his horse, galloped off to where, on the horizon, were visible the outlines of many camels.

"The caravan will soon be here; but the well is nearly dry," remarked Mossiefern.

Before long the camels reached the spring, and Violet's heart ached to see the almost frantic thirst

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of the poor creatures. Men and beasts rushed to the well, drinking long and eagerly. But, alas! long before the fierce thirst of half their number had been satisfied, the little spring began to fail.

"Oh, Mossiefern, look at those poor things! They have not had one drop of water yet, and they seem nearly dying!"

"Yes; they have left many of their number dead or dying already."

"Oh, please let me help them! I cannot bear to see those poor camels' beseeching eyes, entreating me to give them water."

Mossiefern placed in her hands the little golden phial which had once before done such good service for the Irish baby, and bade her kneel and hold it low down in the mouth of the well. No sooner had she done so than the water began to gurgle, and presently gushed forth in a clear, plentiful stream. Camel after camel pressed forward, drinking with deep delight; and it was with feelings of more than ordinary pleasure that Violet read the grateful expression of their eyes, as they looked on their tiny benefactress. Their Arab masters, of course, could only wonder greatly at the marvellous renewing of the spring, which had given them and their valuable camels strength and vigour to face the remaining stage of their journey. Violet quite forgot to

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think that her arms were stiff and sore, and her back aching sadly, from having knelt so long in a cramped position while holding the magic phial to the well's mouth. Aches and pains were lost sight of in the consciousness of having been of so much use to others.

"You see, lady mine," said Mossiefern, as she lay back on the sand, with a sigh of satisfaction, and watched the departing caravan, "it is possible to do good anywhere."

"I really suppose it is, but I never should have thought it, certainly. How strange it is, when one comes to think of it."

"Shall I show you another proof of the good you have done? There has been one follower tracking these weary pilgrims day and night for a week past, knowing well that the feeble and dying would furnish many an easily won meal."

He led Violet to the top of a sandy hillock, and there, not far off, was the grand form of a large lion, his eyes watching the escape of his intended victims with looks of unmistakable anger and astonishment.

On seeing him, Violet hastily requested her owl, and once on it, she had time to feel that she had another reason to be thankful that she had been brought to the desert spring.

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Still she could not help privately wishing that these lands of summer did not abound quite so much in animals several sizes larger and considerably more savage than she at all cared about.

She was awakened from her sleep while still nestling comfortably on the owl's back, by Mossiefern's calling her. The owl was sailing quietly along, but the air seemed filled with exquisite music. Sweet music floated up from the river above whose course they were going, and the woods on its banks seemed alive with melody — melody more wonderful than mortal ear may often enjoy. And thus from river, wood, and even the distant sea, gleaming and shimmering in the moonlight, poured forth the Fairy harmony.

Violet listened in silent, awe-struck delight, yet not a being could she see under all the star-spangled sky save Mossiefern floating on by the side of the white owl. Curiosity at last overcame the sensation of awe, and she whispered:

"Oh, Mossiefern, how wonderful this is! What makes this mysterious beautiful music?"

"Dear maiden, you are specially permitted to hear the melodies coming from the bands of Fairies of earth, and sea, and sky, who go to-night to hold high festival at the Court of Titania, the Fairy Queen. For this is Midsummer Eve, when wondrous revels

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VIOLET'S MOONLIGHT RIDE ON THE OWL'S BACK. (*p.* 70.)

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are celebrated throughout the whole of the Fairy realms, for then the spirits of every element meet and rejoice together."

"And do they never meet except on Midsummer Eve?"

"Yes; on one other occasion the Queen will summon them," replied Mossiefern, with a little hesitation.

"What will that be?" inquired Violet anxiously.

Mossiefern's colour deepened, and, in a strangely low voice he answered:

"The wedding of her eldest son."

"Oh!" cried Violet, suddenly forgetting all her resolutions never to be interested in Fairy doings. "What a wonderful, beautiful sight that would be! Do you think you could possibly manage to let me see it?"

Mossiefern seemed to avoid looking at her purposely, as he replied in the same strange, constrained tone:

"That will not rest with me, fair maid! But the wish that you may be present then is, be assured, the best hope of my life!"

Violet thought his manner of saying this very odd, and to make a little pleasant conversation, she inquired:

"Is the Queen's eldest son good and nice? Do

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you know him? I suppose he is wonderfully handsome, isn't he?"

What in the world could be the matter with Mossiefern? He blushed more deeply than ever, saying reluctantly:

"I believe that those who know the Prince speak well of him."

"I suppose he *is* going to be married," went on the pertinacious young lady. "Who is she? Is she very pretty? She ought to be!"

Then Mossiefern's tongue seemed loosened, though still he never raised his eyes to Violet's face, and he answered readily enough:

"It never occurred to me to think whether people in general would consider her pretty. To me she represents all that is most to be admired and loved."

"Dear me," said Violet to herself, "I think I see why he is so unwilling to speak about the Prince—he is in love with the lady himself! That is a great pity."

Resolving, therefore, not to tease him by any further questions, she soon grew too sleepy to speculate any more on the cause of Mossiefern's strange conduct, contenting herself with thinking him very kind to wish her so much to see the wedding festival; and then she settled cosily down among the owl's soft, snowy feathers, which seemed to retain a perfume from the spice-laden breezes of "Araby the blest."

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AUTUMN.

"Oh, what a glory does this world put on
To him who, with a fervent heart, goes forth
Under the bright and glorious sky, and looks
On duties well performed and days well spent.
For him the wind—aye, and the yellow leaves—
Shall have a voice, and give him eloquent teachings."

Longfellow.

CERTAINLY the white owl possessed very remarkable powers of flight! For Violet opened her eyes on the first scene of the Autumn journey in another hemisphere. They had reached America, and the woods were already glowing golden brown and red, in the richest tints of the departing summer.

It was, as usual, a lovely spot that Mossiefern had chosen, and only the strange foliage of some of the trees, and the unfamiliar song and plumage of the birds, showed that the fair landscape was no English one.

Comfortable farm-houses were here and there to be seen, with most orderly-looking ducks and geese

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in their adjacent ponds; there were home-like farm-yards, with familiar cows, and pigs, and barn-door fowls. It was a refreshing scene to Violet, after her recent experience of southern life.

One farmstead most particularly struck her fancy; it had such a particularly well-to-do, cozy look about it; and she remarked to Mossiefern that it appeared to be a most comfortable home.

"Let us go inside and see," was his reply.

And certainly Violet was not equally satisfied with the interior. A shadow seemed to rest there, and the grey-haired woman who presided over the smoking meal, set ready on the long oaken table, had a weary anxious look quite pitiful to see. Yet the house seemed large and cheerful, comfortable in all its arrangements, and evidently the home of people in easy circumstances. What, then, wondered Violet, caused that nervous frequent glance towards the open door, and ever and anon a half-stifled sigh? There was something out of the common, she felt sure.

Before long a tall, stern-looking elderly man came in, closely followed by a train of hungry labourers just come in from the harvest-field, who immediately seated themselves round the table.

The master said grace in a hurried manner, then silently piled the men's plates, helping himself more

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moderately afterwards. But when he had taken a few mouthfuls, he pushed away his plate with an impatient grunt, and catching his wife's eyes fixed anxiously upon him, he roughly bade her go and see about the men's beer.

"Mossiefern," said Violet, authoritatively, "there is certainly something the matter, and I want to know all about it."

He took her hand and led her a short distance away, where there was an open space on the slope of the hill, fronting those beautiful autumn woods that stretched as far as the eye could reach. From this spot the farmstead they had just left was plainly visible on the rich, corn-laden plain below.

Resting there were three persons; a man of scarcely middle age, a fair, delicate-looking woman, apparently his wife, and a lovely, golden-haired girl of about twelve years old.

Two younger children were looking for nuts in the wood behind them, and as Violet and Mossiefern approached their companion, a little white dog caught sight of them, and startled the little ones by suddenly rushing to them, barking, capering, and showing every sign of joy.

They, of course, could not account for this odd behaviour; but the white dog well knew that Fairies always brought help and comfort with them!

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As they came up to the two elder people, Violet saw that they were gazing wistfully at the distant farmhouse, and the man held his wife's hands clasped in his.

"My heart fails me; I am so near, and yet I feel so far away."

"Oh, Frank! but it is your birthday; they are sure to remember that, even though all these years have passed. He will surely forgive us now."

"I do so dread his saying that we are only come to look after his money," said her husband impatiently.

"And if he should do so, tell him the truth; that by your own industry you have made a comfortable home for me and the children, and that all we need or long for are his forgiveness and affection."

Then the child, who had been listening attentively, asked:

"Why have we never seen our grandfather?"

"Because, dear," answered the mother, "he was bitterly angry at your father's marrying me. He was a rich man, and could not bear the idea of his only son marrying a penniless orphan girl as I was."

"But, Alice, I have never regretted it," said the father, bending down and tenderly kissing the gentle face of his wife. "My father's long estrangement is

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the only thing I have to mourn. Remember that, always, child."

"Still, Frank, if I had known or guessed the truth, I never would have married you, my dear! It is a bad beginning for married life, to cause disunion between parent and child."

"Sweet wife, you are more to me than all the world besides. Still I do so long—I would give so much—to kiss my dear old mother's cheek once more, and feel the strong clasp of my father's hand."

During all this, Alice had stood earnestly watching them and drinking in the sense of all they said, and as the little ones came running up to tell of the dog's strange behaviour in the wood, she moved a little apart, and stood looking down on the farmstead in the valley. Then Mossiefern said to Violet:

"Go—touch her forehead lightly with the wand, she will then follow wherever you may wish to lead her."

He gave her his hand, and Violet was lifted into the air, where she found she could float buoyantly —a great convenience, she was willing to admit, considering her tiny size.

Gently she touched the girl's brow, and then went on before her towards the valley.

Quickly and firmly walked the little maiden, her

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eyes fixed steadily before her, though she never guessed that she was following a Fairy guide.

Onward they went, and before long reached a corn-field, where all the golden sheaves, except a few, had already been carried, and men were busy piling the great waggon with these remaining ones, for the sun was getting low, and the last cart-load must be safely housed in the barn before night.

Watching the labourers, with his back turned to the approaching child, was the tall, stalwart farmer, about whom Violet had interested herself so much. Again she laid her hand on Alice's brow—she had stopped abruptly, on seeing the tall figure before her; at the same moment Mossiefern touched the old man's breast as he turned and saw the child.

Saw, too, in the sweet young face, those imploring eyes that he remembered so well—for had not his son so looked and stood, when he bade him farewell, on this, his birthday, thirteen long years ago. Who could it be that looked up at him with his son's eyes?

"Grandfather!" said the child timidly.

Violet and Mossiefern had done their work, for in another moment the old man held his grandchild in his arms.

Very sweet and pleasant was the sight that met Violet's eyes when she again entered the great room of the farmhouse that evening. The grey-haired

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mother's eyes were bright with the light of other days, as she sat with her son's hand tightly clasped in her's; his wife on her other side, smiling through a mist of happy tears. The stern, hard lines had melted from the farmer's fine old face; he had a grandchild on each knee, and leaning against his shoulder, her arms thrown round his neck, nestled Alice—the golden locks and grey mingling in pretty contrast.

On the hearth lay the little white dog, curled up; and as Violet patted him, his tail began to wag with great energy, and his eyes said as plainly as possible:

"You're a very excellent little creature! You have done a good day's work, and I entirely approve of you."

Certainly it did seem to Violet a most charming way of spending her life to go about doing good everywhere, and she felt that human beings who did not believe in Fairies were but narrow-minded mortals after all!

When the bright sun awakened her next morning she found herself still high in the air. They had just passed over a high range of mountains whose snowy peaks glittered in the morning light. As the owl descended, Violet saw vast gorges, dark and mysterious in their depth, while, where they opened on the plain, were groups of gigantic trees—trees such as she had

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assuredly never seen before. Their towering branches seemed to touch the very clouds, and of such enormous girth were they, that in the trunk of one of them was built a wayside inn!

"What most wonderful trees!" cried Violet; "only think of being able to build a house right inside one! And it is an inn—there is the sign-board! Well, that certainly *is* extraordinary!"

"Yes, we are in an extraordinary land—California."

"Oh! Is not that where they find so much gold?"

"Yes; and gold-getting has been and ever will be the cause of terrible crimes and misery. But we will go into the quiet beautiful woods, and find interest and amusement there."

"But I would much rather see the gold-diggings," said Violet, in a disappointed tone.

"Neither sights nor sounds there are fit for you, sweet maiden! And you must not forget that, being a woodland Fay, I must take you only where green trees exist."

Violet was by no means fond of giving up her own way, but she reflected that Mossiefern had never failed to interest her yet, and that it would be ungrateful and ungracious to doubt him now. So she said, after a short pause:

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"Then I will be content with what we may find in these glorious woods, and they certainly *do* look very inviting. But, Mossiefern," said she, hastily scrambling back on to her owl, from which she had just dismounted, "are you *quite* sure there are no nasty animals—tigers or things? These woods look so like that one in India; and though, of course, I know you would not let them hurt me—still I would *much* rather not go near them."

Mossiefern assured her they would not be likely to meet anything more formidable than a sleepy old bear, which surely she would not be frightened at! So Violet jumped off her owl, and they wandered into the deep rich woods, alive with brilliant birds and insects, and adorned with foliage of varied and beautiful colours. Every now and then, through the thickly arching boughs, they caught glimpses of the golden sunlight overhead; while every fresh butterfly, every bright bird that flitted by in the cool shadow, were sources of new delight. Thus they strolled on until they reached a rapid little stream, rushing through the forest, and on its bank two travellers were resting. They appeared to be young brothers, and a pair of gay parrots in the tree above them were seemingly taking a great interest in their conversation.

"These young men look very sorrowful and

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weary," said Violet; "let us listen to what they are saying, and see if we can help them in any way."

"It's no use," the younger said, sadly; "we may as well give up all hope! I am utterly sick of this dreadful life—of the oaths and drunkenness—and vice! We are robbed of all we had earned—are just as poor as when we started—so we had better make up our minds for a tramp to the coast, and then work our passage home. We are at least young and strong, so any captain will take us gladly."

"Yes, I'm afraid it will have to come to that," replied the elder; "but I cannot give up hope. I feel, somehow, as if we *must* have a chance of getting back the gold we toiled for so patiently and so long. The villains! we are sure to hear of them again, for it was a regular gang, who are certain to rob others. Oh, what would I not give to meet with them once more!"

"Ah! that would be too much luck to happen to us poor fellows, Jack," said his brother wearily. "Try not to think about it."

Just then there came into sight a party of emigrants, evidently homeward bound towards the coast, for they had women and children and heavily-laden mules. The two brothers went up to them, and after a few minutes' conversation with the leader of

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the party, they joined them and went on out of sight together.

"That family is going home rich for the rest of their lives," said Mossiefern to Violet.

"And how miserable those two poor brothers will feel! I do so wish we could find those thieves, and make them give back the money."

"Then we must try to manage it," replied Mossiefern. And even as he spoke a band of some dozen horsemen rode into the little glade, and a more evil-looking set of ruffians could not well be met with. Each one of the dozen looked as if hanging would be too good for him.

Violet's indignation was great indeed, when she found that these men were on the track of the emigrant family ahead, and that they intended to make an attack on them that night. The leader shouted, with an awful oath:

"We shall have made a pretty good thing of it, this trip! Ha! ha! It makes me laugh when I think how neatly we managed those two young fellows! A very good store of nuggets they had, too! Only to think of their believing my tale, and drinking the drugged coffee so innocently! Ho! ho! but I do wish I could have seen the greenhorns waking up, and finding mules and money gone."

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His companions joined in a boisterous laugh at this speech, and Violet was in a thorough rage.

"Mossiefern! Do you hear them? You must make them give up that money—the horrid, wicked wretches!"

"Yes, and I think they will pay for it with their lives," answered he.

The robbers had by this time dismounted; some were engaged in carefully rubbing down their horses, and others superintended cooking operations at a great fire they had lighted. But they rested with their loaded rifles close at hand, and kept within sight the group of mules, presumably laden with their ill-gotten treasure.

Violet spent the time in a state of great impatience; but directly the moon rose the robber-band prepared to start, and Mossiefern called the white owl, which she mounted in a most excited frame of mind. She had, by this time, the greatest faith in Mossiefern; but how could he, clever and brave though he was, manage to defeat a dozen desperate and well-armed men? She did not like to put the question, however, so he floated silently on by her side until they had left the horsemen far behind.

The night was far spent when they came up with the emigrant family, who, all unconscious of danger,

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had camped for the night on the other side of the little river, which was here deep and narrow, pent up between rocky banks, and just below falling in a cataract of some height, over which the waters rushed with a tremendous roar. Opposite the encampment was a rough bridge made of unhewn tree-trunks laid side by side over the boiling torrent. The crevices between the trunks were stuffed with moss and earth, and this perfectly secure, but very primitive bridge, was the only means of crossing the stream. Farther up the bank rose to a considerable height, and from this point the track through the forest could be seen for a great distance. Mossiefern laid his hand on the owl's wing to check her flight, and said to Violet:

"You will have your work to do, and I mine, to defeat these villains, who will come up before long. Your part is to take my wand, touch the forehead of the elder brother, and he will awake and follow you. Lead him to this high cliff, he will then see the men approaching from a distance, and will at once alarm the camp. Then you shall see what will happen."

Violet beheld him dart swiftly back into the forest with a good deal of trepidation; but she determined to be brave and sensible. So, walking steadily into the camp, she awoke the young man, and led him just as Mossiefern had directed.

Very few minutes elapsed before he caught sight

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of the coming foes. He first bent eagerly forward and satisfied himself as to their real character, and then rushing down to the camp immediately gave the alarm.

"The villains are upon us! They are come for your gold! Hide the women and children, for it will be a fight for life, and a desperate one!"

As the startled party hastily prepared for defence the young man rushed to the rude tree-bridge, and Violet, to her intense relief, saw that Mossiefern was guiding and helping him.

Together they hewed at the ends of the trees that lay on their side of the torrent, and had the young man been less excited, he would have greatly wondered at the strength and speed with which his axe was working; for Mossiefern's bright sword was dealing wondrous strokes, and before the leading horseman came in sight all was ready for their reception.

The Fay went back to the robbers, waving his sword to urge them on, for they had hesitated a moment when they saw the camp was on the alert. But it was only for a moment; they again advanced rapidly, stopping, when near the bridge, to deliver a volley at those on the opposite side. They were men who seldom missed their aim, but Violet had seen Mossiefern touching their rifles with his sword, and she knew their skill would be baffled. Not so

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that of the little band of resolute men led by the elder brother.

When the return volley was fired four of the ruffians fell instantly, and then, with a fierce shout of vengeance, the survivors charged the bridge.

Violet turned away, and hid her face in shuddering fear, for there was one awful crash, mingled with despairing shrieks of agony, as men, and bridge, and horses, were hurled down into the boiling, furious torrent beneath.

To certain and instant death had they gone; and now not one of the band survived to tell of their fearful fate.

When Mossiefern rejoined Violet he found her sobbing and trembling with excitement.

"Oh, the poor things! the poor things!" cried she, clinging to his arm.

"Do not pity them, dear girl! There is not one of them whose right hand is not red with many murders. Think, only, how many innocent lives we have saved to-day!"

So Violet dried her eyes, and made a great effort to feel interested in the gratitude shown by all to her especial charge, the elder brother. For, of course, they believed they owed their safety to his vigilance and ingenuity, and yet, in reality, they owed it to the watchful care of the Fairy race.

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They soon cut down some more tall trees, helped, as before, by Mossiefern, and replaced the broken bridge; then they crossed, finding first the dead bodies of the foremost thieves, and farther on, tied securely to the trees, were the laden mules. Deeply and truly thankful were the two brothers at regaining their lost riches, and Violet felt a glad assurance that they would soon reach their native land, and lead there a safer and happier life.

Mossiefern now suggested that he had an excellent plan for the end of their Autumn journey, saying:

"It is to Rome that I would wish to take you now, the summer of whose glory was so splendid, and the autumn of her decline so tranquil. It would be at least appropriate."

Violet gladly assenting, she fell into the dreamless slumber at once, on the comfortable back of her wonderful steed.

It seemed as if she had been asleep a long time when she heard Mossiefern's voice saying:

"Forgive my waking you for a few minutes, but here is such a pretty autumn scene, that I do not think you would like to miss it."

The owl was gliding softly through the air, near enough to the earth for Violet to enjoy the sights and sounds of the rich country over which they were

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going. And certainly the cornfields, the vineyards, and orchards loaded with fruit, made up a most attractive scene, lit as it was with glowing sunshine.

Presently she heard a child's voice calling in distress, and, checking the owl's flight, she watched a little girl wading through the corn and crying:

"Oh, brother! brother! where art thou? The mother will be grieved if we are late, and I have sought thee everywhere."

Now Violet, from her point of vantage up in the air, could see the little fellow fast asleep at the other side of the field, with his dog beside him. She made the owl fly low enough to permit her to touch the girl's forehead, and lead her to where the boy was sleeping; and then watched the delight of the little maiden as she set off home with her charge.

Violet really felt quite indignant when she reflected how utterly unconscious human beings are of the endless helpful acts of the Fairies. She settled herself down again, with this thought on her mind, and when she awoke again they were hovering over the "Eternal City"—that most wonderful assemblage of churches, palaces, and monuments of past triumph.

Above all towered the noble and unequalled cathedral of St. Peter's, and it was on the grand dome of this building that Violet and Mossiefern alighted. It was truly a scene never to be forgotten,

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that glorious panorama of past splendour that lay at their feet, so full of wondrous melodies that the silence seemed to speak of them in a language more eloquent than words. To speak of glories never to return; of the lordly owners of those beautiful palaces—how long so strangely desolate—but with the memories of their artist-masters left enshrined in the noble collections of art-treasures that graced them still.

Floating along in dreamy wonder, Violet and Mossiefern passed through gallery after gallery, filled with exquisite works of art. She paused in admiration before the noble, life-like Apollo Belvedere—that marble dream of perfect manly beauty—and noticed, too, its delicate contrast, the Venus of Praxiteles, with her slender limbs and sweet, girlish face.

Then they visited the wonderful amphitheatre of the Colosseum, and Mossiefern asked Violet if she would like to see this as it was, saying that the reverse of the mirror in which she had once gazed into the future, would show her, as vividly, the past. But she had read of the scenes of ferocity and bloodshed that had disgraced this beautiful building; of the fights between beasts of prey and scarcely less savage human beings; when the acclamations of the multitude greeted the dying struggles of either brute or man—and, with a shudder, she declined the offer.

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Mossiefern had read all her thoughts, and still holding the mirror in his hand he said:

"Yet those were wonderfully brave men, at least. Surely there was something grand in their greeting of the emperor, for whose amusement, even, they thought it an honour to give their lives: 'Those about to die, salute thee, Cæsar!' Sad that so much courage should be so cruelly wasted!"

Then they wandered into the neglected wilderness, which was once the palace of the Cæsars. Here the birds sang unmolested, and the wild flowers grew unchecked, while Violet felt in a world peopled with beings of the past.

"Oh, what must this city have been in the days of her prosperity!" cried she at last.

"We stand by the palace of the Cæsars," answered Mossiefern, "and here, at any rate, you may look without fear on the mirror of the past."

He placed it in her hands, and she noticed that the reverse side was of gold. She looked, and saw the place in which they stood changed to the court-yard of a royal palace, crowded with splendidly-dressed warriors, whose bright helmets and spear-heads gleamed in the sunlight.

From under a marble portico came a chariot wherein stood a tall, beautiful woman, with a child on either side. She was clad in long white robes,

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and her hair fell over her shoulders from under a coronet of gold.

The noble white horses that drew the chariot had trappings of crimson silk, and shouts and acclamations appeared to greet her as she passed down the glittering ranks of the soldiery. Of truly royal mien was that lady—worthy to be the wife of a Cæsar!

Violet watched her pass through the brazen gates, on her way to honour a victorious husband's return.

Then the bright pageant faded, and Violet stood again amid ruins and wild flowers.

"This, then," said Mossiefern, "ends our Autumn journey."

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WINTER.

"I love thee, all unlovely as thou seemest,
Thus gathering, at one short notice, in one group
The family dispersed. . . . .
I crown thee king of intimate delights,
Fireside enjoyments, home-born happiness,
And all the comforts that the lowly roof
Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
Of long uninterrupted evening, knows."

Cowper.

VIOLET woke in a land of glittering brightness. Everywhere, as far as eye could reach, was pure, dazzling snow. The trees were merely great white cones; and the roofs of the pretty village beneath them were festooned with wreaths of snow and icicles; the surface of the river beyond was like a sheet of glass, hard and motionless.

Far and near was heard the tinkling of merry sleigh-bells, as various happy parties drove to where loving smiles and glad welcome awaited them. The air was filled with a clear intense light—the reflection from the polished surface of the snow.

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Violet felt very happy, and determined to select some person or persons in whom to interest herself, and, if possible, to help. Soon her desire was gratified, for there came by a train of inviting-looking sleighs. In the leading one were, firstly, papa—stout, jolly, and comfortable; secondly, mamma—ditto, ditto, ditto, and one or two small creatures.

This sleigh was very picturesque; painted to resemble ebony, and drawn by two small, spirited, black horses. The harness and cushions were scarlet, and with rows of silver bells made up a pretty contrast of colour. The other sleighs were well loaded; two of the party, brother and sister, started off over the frozen river, while the air rang with merry voices and happy laughter.

"Oh, this *is* nice!" cried Violet, her eyes bright and her cheeks rosy from the fresh, bracing air. "Where are we now?"

"In Canada," answered Mossiefern, "and we are watching a Canadian family set off for the Christmas festivities at the grandfather's."

Swiftly flew the black horses over the frozen track, and quite as swiftly flew Violet on her white owl after them, for she greatly wished to be present at the merry-making. Very soon she heard shouts of joy, for at a turn of the road through the dark pine woods, their destination came suddenly in view.

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A quaint, low, many-gabled house it was, the roof white with snow gleaming in the sunshine.

The black horses instinctively quickened their pace, and soon reached the open door, where stood such a picture of a grandpapa! And then was not the noise enough to deafen any ordinary ears! Such a chaos of children tumbling out and hanging round their grandfather, climbing up to kiss him on the nose —or spectacles—or, in fact, anywhere convenient— for this was no time for ceremony.

Then the same thing had to be gone through in a milder form with grandmamma, who was the tiniest and prettiest of little old ladies, looking as if she might have come off the top of a cake, so marvellously neat and compact was she.

During a lull of the many voices came the inquiry:

"But where are Charlie and Isabel?"

"Oh, they came on the ice up the river: they will be here directly, unless they have fallen through anywhere. Oh! here they come!

The brother and sister, glowing and bright, from the air and exercise, joined the happy group. Charlie, especially, looked anything but cold; though grandmamma declared that she was sure he was frozen, and must come in to a warm fire, dear, sweet boy.

Master Charles was decidedly grandmamma's pet, and from that fact it may be safely inferred that he

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was the pickle of the family. Before long the large party was assembled at an early dinner; and during desert it was observed that most of the elder young people left the room, and that grandmamma received various whispered communications, with unexplained nods and "yes, yeses."

Then one little girl in a corner confided to a big cousin that,

"There is to be such a Christmas-tree, and LOTS of presents, only we're not to know, you know."

Violet, feeling intensely interested, went across the hall, and there came upon a door most jealously guarded; for if anybody knocked, a nose was cautiously protruded, and the business of the knocker strictly investigated. She, of course, slipped easily in, and beheld a most gorgeous Christmas-tree—a mass of presents, and ornaments, and many-coloured tapers. Several young people were engaged in nailing up evergreens and ingenious devices in coloured paper round the room, and Violet saw in one corner the pretty sister who had come along the river.

She thought it very odd that she was so slow about doing her share of the decorations, for she was assisted by a tall, dark young man, certainly not one of the family, who had, most kindly, mounted on a window-sill, close by the steps on which she was perched, for the purpose of holding her evergreens

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for her. It was remarkably strange that the work did not progress more quickly, but Violet concluded that she must have hammered her finger, as the dark young man was holding her hand so very carefully; but at last a severe voice cried out:

"Isabel! yours is the only corner unfinished!"

After this the work came to a speedy termination. The candles were lighted, the doors thrown open, and the troop of happy children danced in.

Such a crowd of joyful faces, young and old! Surely there never could have been so wonderful a Christmas-tree before, for everyone got just what they had most wished for.

Isabel had a pretty ring, with stones as blue and bright as her eyes; so Violet overheard the dark young man tell her, and she thought it a great pity that it seemed to fit so badly, for it took the dark young man quite a long time to put it properly on for her.

Charlie's face was radiant with joy, for was he not the proud possessor of a real gold watch, and were not grandmamma's favourite spectacles placed in great jeopardy by his enthusiastic hugs of gratitude?

Then the tree was moved out of the way, and grandpapa said the younger children must have some games before they went to bed. So they played forfeits, and the dark young man was condemned to

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"kneel to the prettiest, bow to the wittiest, and kiss the one he loved best."

After just one glance at Isabel, he knelt to grandmamma, amid a storm of acclamations headed by Charlie; bowed to grandpapa, who was great at jokes, and invariably chuckled over his own with much glee; and after a moment's hesitation, he kissed his own reflection in a mirror!

This last witticism was considered amazingly clever, and the applause was long and loud.

Then came some dancing, and then a pause, for the old clock in the hall chimed twelve. A great bowl of punch was brought, and grandpapa gave the first toast, "Old England," which was drunk with reverent honours. Then grandpapa gave "The Absent;" and afterwards everybody proposed everybody else's health, in a most promiscuous and jovial manner.

Subsequently grandmamma proposed "bed;" but grandpapa said:

"Certainly not. Who ever heard of Christmas Eve without some stories!"

So only the little ones were despatched, while the remainder gathered comfortably round the fire to listen. It was unanimously agreed that,—

"Arnold ought to begin, because he had travelled so much."

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So the dark young man was extracted from a corner, where he had been explaining Bismarck's policy (so he said) to Isabel:

"But I don't remember anything," began he.

"Invent something, then," said grandpapa, with much presence of mind.

"Better begin, 'Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking,'" suggested Charlie, whose ears were promptly boxed by a big brother, and he was ordered peremptorily to hold his tongue.

"I suppose it must have something to do with Christmas-time?" said Arnold inquiringly.

"Yes; certainly! certainly!" answered many voices.

"Very well, then; I'll try my best; so here goes!"

ARNOLD'S STORY.

"Once upon a time—that's correct, isn't it?—it was Christmas-day, in a splendid city—a very grand and beautiful city indeed. From the great dome of the cathedral the bells boomed out a joyous greeting, and within the vast building were costly decorations, banners and flowers. Priests were moving about the high altar, now one blaze of radiance from the countless wax lights. Clouds of incense perfumed the air, and a chorus of sweet young voices rang out, while the subdued strains of the organ mingled with the fresh clear tones.

"A movement in the crowd of expectant people, and from a side door issued forth a lordly procession. First, his head erect, and his whole mien denoting haughty pride, came the

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Cardinal, resplendent in scarlet and white lace, and following him many priests and dignitaries of the Church, and, lastly, a military guard of honour—for these were troublous times, and his Eminence was not too well-beloved.

"From the admiring multitude stepped forward a middle-aged man, who, kneeling humbly, presented a petition to the Cardinal, and then stood waiting, his face pale with anxiety, as the arbiter of his fate read on.

"'How is this? Thy daughter petitions to be released from her promise to enter the sanctuary of the Church?' said the Cardinal, at length, with an impatient frown.

"'It will break her heart, and those of her parents, if she be compelled to do so,' replied the man, nervously.

"'And wherefore did your daughter first declare her wish to renounce the world, and now desire to change her mind?' inquired the great man, sternly.

"'She is betrothed, your Eminence.'

"'Then surely that was a sufficient reason for never desiring to take the veil,' was the impatient comment.

"'She was told that her lover was killed,' began the man.

"'Well, then, if he's dead, surely there's an end of it.'

"'But he isn't, may it please your Eminence.'

"Very wrathful grew the great dignitary's brow, as he exclaimed:

"'Unless you can explain this matter lucidly and briefly, I shall assuredly disregard your application, even though it be Christmas-day, when it is my custom and desire to grant every petition that is possible. Proceed, then, to state your case clearly, if you can.'

"'Your Eminence, someone attempted to murder the youth, but left the dark deed incomplete.'

"'More's the pity,' growled the Cardinal, in an undertone.

"'He lay for many hours bleeding and insensible, until a good and charitable woman found him by chance and had him conveyed to her own home.'

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"'Yes, yes; and of course she told your daughter all about it.'

"'Not so, your Eminence. They could not tell who he was; he lay delirious for weeks, and my poor child believed he was dead, for a body said to be his had been found in the river and instantly buried.'

"'Bless the man! and whose was it, then?' He added something else in a lower voice, which was inaudible, as the attendant priests coughed violently.

"'That of the would-be assassin, who had committed suicide.'

"'Come, that's a comfort!—one of them out of the way, at any rate!' said the Cardinal, cheerfully. 'Well, and what is it you wish me to do, eh?'

"'Oh, your Eminence, if you would but grant my child a release from her promise to take the veil!'

"'Hum—ah—yes—well, I don't suppose she'll be much of a loss to the Church, and as it is Christmas-day, why there!'

"And hastily pencilling a few words at the head of the petition, he handed it back to the suppliant and moved on, followed by murmurs of approbation from the people.

"For he had done a kind action, and filled one home at least with joy and thankfulness. So on that Christmas-night blessings were showered on his head, which was a thing that did not often happen to him.

"The delighted father took the pencilled words of the Cardinal back to his family, and never remembered how harsh and repellent his manner had been. There was so much rejoicing, and the young girl wept for joy on her lover's shoulder.

"But in the midst of all this, a tremendous knocking was heard at the door, and the mother, as she opened it, was nearly frightened into a fit by finding herself face to face with a terribly fierce-looking soldier. The poor thing made up her mind to instant imprisonment at the very least; but instead of this, the fierce soldier merely brought a formal order of release for the young girl from her unfortunate promise, and he actually

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turned out a very jolly fellow, so they asked him in to supper, and they drank the Cardinal's health with uproarious honours. It is reported that at the wedding shortly afterwards the soldier proposed to the bride's sister; but that I won't vouch for. And that's the end of my story."

Much clapping of hands and applause ensued, and grandpapa observed:

"Very fair; very fair, indeed, for a young beginner. Now, Isabel, it is surely *your* turn next."

"Oh, grandpapa! *Please* don't. I have really nothing to tell."

"Oh, come," said Charlie, "that's good! How about the misletoe?"

Isabel blushed deeply, while Arnold looked at him severely.

"I mean, of course, only that legend thing you made up, all about the Druids and things."

"Druids?" inquired the smallest remaining child, doubtfully.

"Yes; they were queer old buffers, long ago, in ancient Britain, who lived under oak trees, and crowned themselves with the leaves. Heathen priests they were, and built themselves no end of strange temples, of such jolly big stones, that no one has ever been able to make out how they managed to move them. I should just like to see our clergyman trying it on, that's all! I guess he wouldn't give us

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a long sermon the next Sunday! Well! when these old fellows couldn't get leaves, they used misletoe for their altars and crowns, and held it sacred, observing certain rites under it."

"Do they observe any now?" asked the small child, much impressed.

Charlie winked an unexplained wink, replying:

"Oh dear no! There are no Druids now; that was ages and ages ago!"

"Come, little woman! Let us hear it!" said grandpapa. So, with a quivering voice and very red cheeks, Isabel repeated the

"LEGEND OF THE MISLETOE.

"Far o'er Galilee's star-lit plains
Echoes the angels' song;
And wondering shepherds hear the strains
Break from the glorious throng!

"'Glory to God on high!' they sing,
'On earth good-will to men!'
The lone hills with the chorus ring—
It floats o'er moor and fen.

"O'er earth and sky the angels go,
On this first Christmas-day,
For all lands must the tidings know,
Must hear, and then obey.

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"O'er Britain flew an Angel fair—
The Spirit of a child—
He saw the great oaks towering there,
Folded his wings and smiled.

"For there, 'mid many a forest tree,
A band of Druids hold
High feast and heathen revelry,
With dark rites never told.

"Stern winter reigned all cold and white,
No green on oaken bough,
Whence come those leaves and berries bright
That deck the altar now?

"'Twas misletoe hung fresh and green,
'Mid frost and snowy air,
The Angel-child beheld the scene,
And left a blessing there!

"He gently touched each shining bough,
Hung on the altar grey,
Or binding hoary Druids' brow,
Then went he on his way.

"But the sweet spell of angel hand
On the misletoe hangs now,
Where gathers a glad Christmas band
There hangs the well-known bough.

"Long are the Druids passed away,
No heathen rites are here,
The misletoe holds joyful sway
'Mid Christian love and cheer!"

Much applause greeted Isabel's effort, for the

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audience was more loving than critical, and it was at once agreed that grandmamma should tell the next story, so she accordingly began.

GRANDMAMMA'S STORY.

"A long time ago there lived in Germany a grim old Baron—a widower with an only son. Although far from rich, his family was considered to be older than the hills, and infinitely more important.

"So he had naturally decided that Conrad, his son, who was brave and handsome, should make a marriage calculated to retrieve the impecuniosity of the Von Schloppendummekopfs, which was the family name.

"It was not, however, a particularly easy task to find a lady possessed of a sufficient amount of money, and yet noble enough to be allied to one of this distinguished house.

"Not very far off, however, in the middle of a gloomy forest, stood a castle surrounded by high walls, whose only known entrance was by enormous iron gates, through which no male foot had ever been permitted to pass.

"For the owner of the castle, of the gloomy forest, and of many a surrounding league, was an unmarried lady, of very ancient family, and with an enormous rent-roll; so the Baron, after much cogitation, decided on her as a future daughter-in-law. Yet he could not help feeling sundry twinges of conscience before laying on his son his commands to this effect, for the lady, besides being of ancient family, was decidedly so herself likewise; and besides being rich, there were rumours of her being uncommonly queer—to say the least of it.

"The Baron had endeavoured to ease his mind by revealing his plans to the old family confessor, over a quiet bottle of Burgundy, and that wise man merely smiled a most peculiar smile, but never a word did he vouchsafe.

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"So the old Baron asked him indignantly 'What he meant by it?' and stalked off to bed in the sulks, banging the door after him, and more uneasy than ever as to his conscience.

"But the family of the Von Schloppendummekopfs were remarkable for what *they* termed firmness, and their friends something else, so the Baron arose next morning, fully determined on declaring his absolute wishes to his son, that he was to bring the Lady of the Forest back to the paternal halls as his bride.

"Conrad is a good boy—a *very* good boy," said he to himself, in a fit of meditation, while dressing, and then his memory recalled a scene that had taken place not many months ago, when, after a terrible battle, the King himself had called for Conrad, and knighted him on the battle-field, in acknowledgment of his gallant conduct during the day.

"The Baron remembered how his heart had swelled within him, so proud was he of his brave young son, and something got into his eyes and made him wink, and into his throat and made him cough, when he thought of the fate he destined for the gallant youth, whom the King himself had delighted to honour.

"The old gentleman duly prepared himself for expostulations, entreaties, and even a storm of rage—but he had not prepared himself for what *did* happen, namely, that Conrad immediately and dutifully observed that his parent's wishes would always be considered by him as laws, and that if he were furnished with a letter of introduction he would set forth on his errand without delay.

"The Baron's eyes opened to their widest capacity; but he felt it most prudent to make no comment, and withdrew to compose the necessary letter, with the aid of the confessor. If Conrad, when he started on his journey, had looked back, he might have beheld the parental countenance at an upper window, staring after him with an air of much perplexity, and would have also seen his papa scratch his head, and then shake it, in an anxious and puzzled manner.

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"But the young knight rode gaily and unconcernedly along until he came to the borders of the forest, when, oddly enough, he left his horse at a woodman's hut, proceeding alone and on foot. When he reached the castle he did not ring the bell at the great iron gates, but, keeping quite away, passed round the high walls until he reached a little turret, entirely apart from the main building of the castle.

"Here he gave three low calls on a silver whistle, and, strange to say, a fair young face almost immediately showed itself at the turret window.

"'Oh, Conrad, you are come again! Then your father has consented?'

"'Sweet Ermengarde, not only consented, but he absolutely commanded me to win you,' answered Conrad. And then, entering by a secret postern-door, hidden by thick bushes, he was soon at the girl's side and showed her the Baron's letter—formally soliciting the hand of the Lady of the Forest in marriage for his only son.

"'But, Conrad,' said the maiden, after a pause, 'are you quite sure the Baron means me, and not my step-sister?'

"'My own Ermengarde, he could not possibly be cruel enough to wish me to marry that old cat!'

"'*Could* he not!' said a deep voice close to them, and there stood the tall form of the castle's mistress, evidently having been a witness to the whole scene.

"She was clothed in long robes of dark blue woollen stuff, with a hood of the same on her head, and her face was harsh and wrinkled.

"Ermengarde screamed and ran into the castle, dropping the Baron's letter in her flight, which the dark lady picked up and silently perused. Conrad had turned very pale, but he confronted the steady gaze of the mysterious lady without flinching.

"'Allow me to assure you that, being the only lady in this castle of whose existence your father is aware, I *am* the person

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he desires you to marry. Possibly I may accept the proposal. Who knows?'

"And with a smile so grim that poor Conrad shivered in his boots, this terrible female signed him to follow her into the castle. Through vast halls and silent corridors they passed without meeting a single living being, and at length, at the end of a long dark corridor, Conrad found himself in a low vaulted chamber, very dimly lighted by high narrow slits in the thick stone walls.

"'Not much chance of escape, you see,' said the deep voice. 'It is fortunate for you that, this being Christmas-eve, I may not be so very hard on you! Are you and that maiden really in earnest?'

"Poor Conrad poured forth a flood of lover's eloquence in reply, and declared that he loved Ermengarde better than his life.

"'We shall soon be able to judge of that. You are to pass the night in this chamber, and if you are of the same mind to-morrow morning—it is Christmas-day—my consent will be granted.'

"Conrad would have knelt at her feet in gratitude, but she had passed instantly out of the room, and he was left alone.

The hours went on—it was now perfectly dark—and his mind at first busied itself with conjectures as to the strange reception the dark lady had given, and then, more satisfactorily, with bright dreams of the future, when midnight struck. At the same moment the low chamber was filled with a dim blue light, and Conrad, to his horror, beheld an enormous rat sitting upon the table and glaring at him with unpleasant green eyes. His mind was not set any more at ease by the rat's suddenly squeaking out:

> "'Poverty dire the knight will betide
> Who weds Ermengarde, a penniless bride!'

"'As if I cared for any money, you little brute!' cried he

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angrily, as he made a lunge at the rat with his sword. But to his great bewilderment, no rat was there! He hunted about in vain, and had just re-seated himself, when down the chimney came tumbling a huge raven, who croaked dismally:

"'Well-a-day, well-a-day!
Poor young man!
Run away, run away
When you can!'

"'So I will, you may be sure—when I get Ermengarde!' replied Conrad, who determined to take things quite quietly. A black cat, a toad, a serpent, and a gigantic bat successively made their appearance, each uttering some mysterious warning against Ermengarde; and lastly appeared a beautiful little white dove, who perched confidingly on his shoulder, and her voice sounded sweet and low as she murmured in his ear:

"'*You* think Ermengarde's face is fair,
You admire her tresses of golden hair,
Her figure so graceful and teeth like pearls;
But *I* know well where she bought her curls.
She paints her fair face with red and white,
She stuffs and she pads, and she laces tight,
And takes all her teeth out every night.'

"'I don't believe a word of it, you little vixen! I should like to wring your neck!' shouted Conrad, and after that he was left in peace until the morning.

"Meanwhile the dark lady locked Ermengarde up in her own room; but with the earliest dawn she roused her, bidding her follow her to the top of a tower, when, to the girl's extreme surprise, came seven small black birds—each appearing to whisper something in her step-sister's ear.

"As the last flew away Ermengarde's astonishment knew no bounds, so marvellous was the change which immediately took place in her companion. The dark robes fell off, the face was

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no longer wrinkled, and it was a stately and beautiful woman who now folded the young girl tenderly in her arms!

"'The spell is broken! Your lover remains faithful, and I am free at last, to place your father's lands and castle in your own keeping, sweet child.'

"Very much astounded and delighted was Conrad at the transformation, when summoned by the happy Ermengarde; and the elder lady then explained her strange story.

"The young girl's father had been a wizard, possessing the powerful services of a snake-familiar. He had fallen in love with the lady, and she incurred his bitter vengeance by scornfully declining his suit, though she dearly loved his sweet little daughter. Feeling his end approaching, the wizard gave his horrid slave its liberty, on condition of a spell being cast over the object of his selfish and wicked passion, which should condemn her to a solitary and anxious life.

"So, on his death, she was shut up in this castle, and appeared a hideous, repulsive old woman. The spell was only to be broken if Ermengarde won the true love of a young knight without her knowledge. If, however, she in any way assisted in the matter the girl was to die a fearful death. This was also to befall her should the knight, whose love she gained, be unfaithful after seven supernatural warnings. If his affection bore this last dreadful test, the spell would be at an end, and the poor lady set free once more. She added that she was aware that the spell was weakest on Christmas-eve, and that she had confidently believed in Conrad's overcoming this curse.

"Certainly, all things considered, they were entitled to spend a most happy Christmas-day.

"Not very long afterwards came a splendid wedding, and before many more Christmases had passed the once gloomy castle was enlivened by little pattering feet and merry voices.

"The young people especially enjoyed looking at a picture which Conrad had had painted (in the stiff, formal style of those

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days), representing their pretty young mother's interview with the dark lady, and the seven messenger-birds.

"The old Baron found his home very lonely when Conrad was gone, and there was nobody, except the old confessor, to talk to during the long winter evenings. He was much taken with the sweet dignity of Brunhilda (the late dark lady), and somehow it ended in her becoming the second Baroness, while the Baron himself looked twenty years younger forthwith.

"The confessor, who had known Brunhilda's story from the beginning, rejoiced greatly thereat, and sat in his warm corner by the fire, beaming benevolently on the happy scene."

"Oh, grannie! that is no end of a jolly story!" cried Charlie. "I think they were all regular bricks!"

"Then reward me for it by telling *me* one," said grannie, coaxingly.

"Oh! I say! What a horrid shame to ask me! Why—how could I go inventing stories!"

"Never mind, old fellow!" said Arnold; "we are all anxiously waiting, and you couldn't disoblige grandmamma after the watch, surely?"

There was no resisting this appeal, so Charlie laid his curly head on his grandmother's knee, and thus commenced.

CHARLIE'S STORY.

"Well, there was once a jolly old miser."

"Order!" interrupted Arnold, "misers aren't jolly."

"Shut up! and don't interfere. I tell you my miser *was* jolly; only it's true he did not know it, for he made a point of

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declaring that he didn't care a straw for anybody; and lived all by himself in a lonely cottage.

"Old curmudgeon!" remarked Arnold.

"*Will* you be quiet!" exclaimed the injured narrator; "he'll come out all right in time, if you'll only just leave him alone. Where was I? Oh, well, one morning he was awakened by the church bells ringing merrily. Now going to church had not been his style of late years, but he knew that, as a rule, church bells meant Sunday. So he thought and thought, for he was quite sure that day couldn't be Sunday, and at last it suddenly struck him that it must be Christmas-day.

"For, you see, as he cared for nothing and nobody, he didn't take any particular notice of Christmas-time. It occurred to him, also, that he might just as well take a stroll down to the village, just to see how foolishly his fellow-creatures behaved, and on his way he passed two children in difficulties with a big umbrella and a snow-shower.

"'Little plagues!' growled he; but he helped them, nevertheless. Something, he did not know what, prompted him to do it. If he had been a wiser man, he would have known that people's good angels hover over them on Christmas-day and try to make them loving and gentle. But he did not know it, so he wistfully watched the children, who were laden with books and presents, enter a cottage where Jacob (that was the old fellow's name) knew there were lots of little folks.

"For Jacob knew all about that cottage; knew and thought a great deal more than he would have owned. As he passed, a child's face appeared at the window, watching some robins pick up crumbs on the sill.

"'Dear! dear!' said he, as he turned back to his lonely home, 'how like that child is to what poor Tom was, when his mother died, to be sure!' Now Tom was Jacob's half-brother, who had been a sad scapegrace; he ran away to sea first, then married, contrary to his brother's advice, and finally, when re-

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monstrated with, told Jacob he was an old bear, and that he would never take word or help from him again. So Jacob resolved to make him keep his promise, and maintained a stony silence through many years, though he knew they were very poor, and this winter, particularly, they must be in great distress, for Tom had saved the life of a man who had fallen through the ice, and broken his own leg in doing it. He knew that Tom was very bad, and they had no money to pay a doctor, but he still continued his silent indifference, and Tom was too proud to ask from him either help or sympathy.

"The wings of his good angel rustled in his ears as he walked home, and he could think of nothing the whole day but the pretty baby-face at the window, and his poor, sick, suffering brother. At length he could stand it no longer; he jumped suddenly up and exclaimed:

"'Tom was right, after all! I *am* an old bear!—but Heaven helping me, I'll spend this Christmas-night properly!'

"So he lighted his lantern and started off to his brother's cottage; and weren't they glad to see him! And he was no end kind to them all; and they lived happily ever afterwards."

"Bravo, old Charlie!" cried Arnold.

And grandmamma kissed him, whispering how much she had enjoyed the little story; while grandpapa, who had been snoring peacefully for the last half-hour, suddenly woke up and said:

"Very good indeed, Arnold! Most interesting account, my dear boy!" Which caused a general laugh; and then grandmamma said that now everybody must really go to bed, or they would never be up in time for church in the morning. So, chatting and laughing, the happy party dispersed.

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"Oh, Mossiefern!" said Violet, softly, "we have not helped them one bit!"

"No," replied he; "there is a state of human content and happiness that no Fairy aid can increase. But now, Violet, there comes a crisis in your fate and in mine. The year and a day is over; we must return to the Fairy cottage, and there you must decide, once and for all, on your future destiny!"

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SECOND JOURNEY.

BEATRICE AND ARIEL.

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IN THE REALM OF DREAMS.

"I know where the winged visions dwell
That round the night-bed play
I know each herb and flowret's bell
Where they fold their wings by day."—*Moore.*

SWIFTLY flew Beatrice and Ariel over the trees, and at first she could think of nothing but trying all kinds of experiments with her wings. She was perfectly delighted with them—soaring high into the air, then dropping almost to the earth, and finally challenging Ariel to a race, in which he politely allowed himself to be beaten, when she settled on the tip-topmost branch of a tall elm-tree, panting and out of breath with her exertions.

She was soon eagerly employed in watching the gambols of a young squirrel; and kept Ariel pretty briskly employed in fetching her nuts, with which she fed him; and the pretty little creature was quite

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at his ease, for he, in common with all animals, knew that cruelty is a vice unknown among the gentle and beautiful Fairy race.

Then Beatrice got tired of that and had another fly, which put her out of breath again. As soon as she recovered she said, with an air of authority:

"Now, Ariel, you've got to amuse me, you know. Where are we to go first?" she asked, briskly.

"I think we had better visit the Realm of Dreams," answered Ariel.

"Where's that?" inquired she.

"Up in Cloudland, and it stretches far, far higher even than that, reaching to the sun, and moon, and stars."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Beatrice, somewhat startled, "that will be a *very* long way to fly, won't it?"

"Oh yes; much farther than your wings could manage. But I have prepared a conveyance for you —look!"

And Beatrice saw a great crystal bell, borne up by a number of little winged beings, who held it by long blue ribbons. As it came nearer, she could better distinguish the lovely little creatures who guided it. They had the forms and faces of beautiful children, each had a great white book and a little golden harp slung over the shoulder. Their robes

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were nearly all of the softest rose-colour, but some wore an azure blue.

"Oh, Ariel, what exquisite little creatures! What are they?"

"You have often seen these beings before," replied he.

"I'm sure I never have!" cried Beatrice; "how could I?"

"Have you never noticed the rosy clouds that float over the sky at sunset?"

"Yes, of course, often and often," said she.

"Well, if you had possessed the power of Fairy sight, you would have seen they were groups of these beings—the Dream-Fairies—their rosy dresses shining in the sunlight, waiting to descend to earth when day should be fairly gone, to paint pictures for little sleeping children."

"Paint pictures?" inquired Beatrice.

"Yes. They have each a magic pencil, which draws in every brilliant colour—for children's dreams should be bright, you know."

"Then I'm sure they're not! They're awfully horrid when you've eaten anything that disagrees with you! I don't like them at all!" cried she, with an energetic toss of her hair.

"But then, you see, the Dream-Fairies are good and wise little spirits, and that is their way of

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punishing those who are silly enough to be greedy; they frighten them with terrible pictures."

"How nasty of them! Dear me! I'll be very careful in future. But I hadn't the remotest idea of it all! What are the golden harps for?"

"They are the harps of memory, and are, of course, for older people; for when the Dream-Fairies play on them soft, beautiful music, there arise visions of the past. But the children's Fairies never use their harps, for children have no past."

"But I always thought grown-up people went sound off to sleep and snored. I've often seen them in church, and they surely don't dream *then*."

"The visions of grown people are mostly waking-dreams, and are called 'castles in the air.' If the Dream-Fairies are permitted, they sketch for them bright visions of the future; but sometimes they are to be punished, and then the Fairies draw most gloomy pictures, and occasionally spread a thick veil, so that nothing at all appears. That is their severest punishment; for if hope be banished life is desolate indeed!"

"But they are gentle, loving little creatures, and cannot bear to give pain; so they generally, then, take out their harps, and play sweetly until the dark veil lifts, and comfort comes again."

"What jolly little creatures!" observed Beatrice,

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who was sadly too much of a schoolboy in style. "Did a Dream-Fairy ever look after me, I wonder?"

"Yes; and it is your own particular Dream-Fairy who will lead us up to their wonderful home. She will travel with us in the crystal bell."

Ariel waved his hand, and one of the Dream-Fairies flew down and softly kissed Beatrice's cheek.

"You sweet little pet!" cried she; "are you really and truly my very own Fairy?"

"Yes! indeed I am! And I am so glad to see you up here, for I particularly want you to have some new ideas. I am *dreadfully* tired of the things I have to paint for you!"

Then she opened page after page of the dream-book, and it contained nothing but ponies, dogs, cricket-matches, boats, schoolboys, and various athletic sports.

"You see," continued the Spirit, in an injured tone, "it is really *very* tiresome! I do so wish you'd try a little change! It's no use painting anything for you at night; for you toss about, and grunt, and won't look at anything—and then in the day come these endless schoolboy things. Now some people have books upon books of beautiful interesting day-dreams —how, else, do you suppose poets could write poetry, or artists paint pictures, or musicians compose music? It is our help that does it."

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"Dear me, some of you must have an awful lot to do!"

"Yes, indeed," replied the Fairy; "but then it's such nice interesting work for those people, you see! But when one has nothing to do but to depict hunting scenes and cricket-matches, it becomes extremely monotonous, I assure you."

"I'm sure I'm awfully sorry; but I couldn't possibly help it if I didn't know, could I? Is there anything you can recommend to make me more interesting for the future?"

"If you would only be just a little more imaginative! A slight romantic turn is a great help—I don't mean, of course, that you should exactly fall in love; but if you could feel the least bit sentimental (it does not matter in the least about whom) so as to get up a little variation."

"Good gracious ME!" interrupted Beatrice, in a tone of deep scorn, "you don't suppose I would make such a goose of myself, do you? If you can't make a more sensible suggestion than that, you'll have to go on for ever at the boys, and dogs, and things, *I* can tell you!"

The poor Dream-Fairy shrugged her shoulders in despair, and Ariel asked Beatrice if she would not enter the crystal bell.

"Why in the world do we have a bell?" inquired she.

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"Because we must pass through regions of space devoid of air," replied Ariel, coolly.

"But—oh! I say! we shall choke!" exclaimed Beatrice, aghast.

"Yes, we should certainly, only in this bell there is a perpetual supply of magic air, which we take with us."

"Dear me; why it's like a diving-bell, then!"

"Certainly not a *diving*-bell; but you can call it an ascending-bell, if you wish."

"Well, it's all the same!" said Beatrice rather impatiently, for she was at no time fond of corrections. "I declare it's awfully comfortable in here! Isn't it?"

She had entered the bell, and found nice little sofas of blue satin round the inside, on which she, Ariel, and the Dream-Fairy were soon cosily settled.

Through the crystal sides she looked down on trees and fields, and rivers; while overhead she could see the blue ribbons all tightened now, for the winged Fairies were bearing them swiftly upwards towards the clouds.

"How very odd this sensation is, to be sure!" remarked Beatrice at length, who seemed to feel security in curling up her feet tight under her, and was flattening her small nose against the glass, in order to see all she could.

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"Oh!" cried she, in a sudden burst of astonishment, "the earth is dropping down *ever* so fast!"

"It is only we who are mounting so fast," replied Ariel.

Before long the earth was quite out of sight, for they had passed into dense masses of clouds, and nothing could be distinguished but the dim grey vapour. Then came a great chasm—the deep blue sky above, and towering banks of rolling clouds on either side. Through this rift Beatrice looked down, and beheld the setting sun flooding all the western sky with glorious colour. Now, too, she could easily discern the Dream-Fairies, with their rosy robes, hovering in the air, waiting for night to come. It did seem so very odd that she had never been able to see them before!

Higher and higher mounted the crystal bell—the clouds lay like a soft white rolling sea below, and there was no sound or movement to break the solemn stillness of the blue expanse above. There were the stars and the moon only to be seen; all was silent, unbounded space, filled with clear moonlight, and grandly, eternally calm.

"This silence is very dreadful—I feel frightened!" said Beatrice, to whom quiet had always been oppressive, even on earth, and up here, in this vast, lifeless solitude, it was appalling.

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"Yours is the only mortal voice that has ever sought to break the stillness," answered Ariel. "Foolhardy men have constructed giant balloons and endeavoured to soar as high, but they have almost paid for the attempt with their lives. For the air up here is far too thin to support any form of mortal life, and before long we shall leave the atmosphere entirely below us. But as we have yet very far to go, suppose your Dream-Fairy were to summon one of the others, either to tell you stories or show you their picture-books."

"That's a capital idea!" cried Beatrice, for the sensation of awe was beginning to wear off, and she found the solemn stillness rather monotonous.

So her own Dream-Fairy left the bell, and presently returned with another Spirit. Beatrice observed that the robes of the new-comer were azure, and she wore a circlet of gold upon her brow, in the centre of which blazed a star of living light. At Ariel's suggestion she at once began her story.

"I had charge of a great writer—a writer whose prose was more beautiful than poetry, and who has left his mark for all time on English literature. Look at my books, how richly stored they are with graceful fancies."

Turning over the pages of the dream-book, Beatrice suddenly stopped, with a cry of recognition.

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"Oh! I know these pictures so well. They belong to the 'Last Days of Pompeii!'"

"Yes," replied the Spirit; "those are pictures especially rich in colouring; and you see there are others quite different; some sweet moonlit sketches, others dreamy, far-away fancies, and others, again, show scenes of rugged grandeur. Every phase of human life is represented, in all the varied shades of joy or misery. Truly, his was the hand of a great master!"

"Is it because he was so great that you wear that diadem and star?" asked Beatrice, respectfully.

"Yes; each of us, who has served a distinguished master, bears the star of his genius, shining in a crown upon our heads; and we are very many, and belong to every time and country, from the Spirit who watched over old Homer to myself, alas! so lately crowned; for, until our masters' work on earth is finished, we are not thus honoured. Then we are free for all time to come; none of us ever serve a second time. It is our part then to hover over earth, helping those who desire to follow in our master's footsteps, or read by the light of his genius. Some take our help too plentifully, and become mere copyists, but many and many a struggling poet, painter, or musician has had good reason to thank our unseen helping hands."

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"I certainly never imagined," said Beatrice thoughtfully, "that I should ever see the dream-pictures from which the 'Last Days of Pompeii' was written. It's really very strange." And while she was pondering on this the Spirit flew out of the bell, and another entered, who wore no crown.

"I liked the last Dream-Fairy awfully, and I hope I shall like you as well," said Beatrice, rather doubtfully. "But before you begin, I want to ask a question. Why do you, and the last one, and some others, wear blue dresses, and not rose-colour, like all the children's Dream-Fairies?"

"Because our term of service is over. The azure robe is the token we have lost our master. And now I will tell you my story.

"It was my lot to brighten the hours of a long and unjust captivity. A young man was accused of a crime he had never committed, and cast into prison by the command of a powerful noble. Here his life was passed in dreary sameness, and I think he would have gone mad but for my willing aid. I drew him pictures of life and liberty in the beautiful city in which he had been born, and where he knew his old father and mother were weeping for him.

"I felt sure that his innocence would be declared in time, and it was best to make the pictures very bright, and it was piteous to watch him gaze on them

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until his eyes were blinded with tears. Then I used to take up my harp and calm his mind by filling it with pictures of the past.

"He thought of his betrothed, how sweetly and earnestly she had asserted her perfect faith in his innocence, and her conviction that he would soon be set free again. Very solemnly, too, she had promised to wait for that happy time—to wait, if necessary, even unto death. All these soothing thoughts woke at the music of my harp, and the days and nights passed on in silent expectation.

"At length the glad time arrived. The real culprit, stricken down with sickness, had confessed his guilt, and my charge was set free amid great rejoicing. His betrothed met him at the prison gate, and he read in her eyes a sweeter story than all my art could show.

"On their way to the city they met a guard of soldiers, who were conveying the real culprit to fill the place of my young friend. He was laid on a rude litter, and the fair girl turned to look with horror on the cause of their long misery. But when she beheld the pale, wan, wistful face, she saw that he was dying, and that his misery had been even greater than her own. The sick man saw her glance, and raising himself, by a great effort, on his elbow, he murmured:

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"'Oh, forgive me! Only say that you can forgive me!'

"Then the young girl turned to her lover, saying softly:

"'Come, then, my beloved! It is surely not on this most happy day that we can harbour cruel thoughts.'

"So, hand in hand, they went up to the litter, and the sweet voice of the young girl assured the sick man of pity and of pardon.

"Thus, holding their hands, and looking into their faces with a smile of infinite gratitude, his spirit passed away, and he lay back dead.

"The young couple went quietly home, thinking of many things; and it was to my harp's music that he told her and his parents of his thoughts, and hopes, and fears during his long captivity.

"The nobleman who had condemned him to imprisonment came himself to express his deep regret, and made the young man his chief forester.

"So the young people were contented and happy, and the old couple could look over the green valley from their house in the city wall, and see the light shining from their son's cottage window."

Then the Spirit flew away, and another came down, whose air was sad and mournful, and who was crowned with a wreath of fresh roses.

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"Why have you that wreath of flowers?" immediately asked inquisitive Beatrice.

"Because I served a maiden, and I wear these flowers—scarcely sweeter or fairer than herself—in memory of her."

"My brother and I were twin spirits, and one day we basked idly on a shady bank in a beautiful southern country. At length I called softly:

"'Sleepest thou, brother?'

"And he answered:

"'Nay; but I thought of the Great Mother—that she will soon be grieved at our purposeless life. She loves not idleness. We must be up and doing, sister mine. Seest thou the youth and maiden gathering wild flowers yonder?'

"'I see them. The maiden's cheek is thin and pale, and his rosy with health. How strong and firm his step, while hers is slow and faltering.'

"'Dost thou know their story? He is the only son of a rich noble, and she a Danish maiden, chilled well-nigh to death by the wintry cold of her northern home. Her mother and his were early friends; thus it comes that she has been sent here, in the hope that she may regain her strength in this warm, sunny land.'

"'Brother; let us make these two our care. I will enter the heart of the maiden; do thou abide in

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the breast of the youth. So shall we fulfil the design of the Great Mother.'

"'Thou hast spoken well; so be it,' said he; and, with one fond kiss, we parted; he to make his home in the breast of the youth, and I to watch over the life of the maiden.

"Sometimes we could speak together, my brother and I, but very rarely, for *then* the minds of both youth and maiden were very active.

"The visions that I was required to paint at first were of heaven, and its rest and peace; for the girl believed she was dying, and did not repine, for her life had known so much weary pain that she had no dread of death.

But a change had lately come. The pictures were no more to be of heavenly rest. She no longer wished to die, and what she now loved to gaze upon were visions of earthly love and happiness. Life with the dark-eyed youth was her one day-dream then. Most tenderly and carefully he waited on her, carrying her in his arms if the way were unfit for her delicate feet; though I knew full well—for my brother told me—that the pictures painted for him were to be of deeds of daring and adventure, of travel in far-distant lands, of glory and ambition. Very few and very faint were the visions of the sweet, gentle maiden who was learning so fast the dangerous lesson

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of a first love. Yet he was really fond of her, and considerately avoided over-fatiguing or distressing her in any way. His was a kindly nature, nor did any one, save my brother and myself, know how little all this care indicated.

"For if *she* were pictured, he just gave one look and moved away; while if my brother painted the scenes of stirring adventure that he loved, then his eyes grew bright, his cheek would flush, and he was never tired of gazing.

"I sighed deeply when I heard all this, for long after she should have been sleeping soundly I had to play on the golden harp, while she recalled every look, and word, and gesture of the young man's during the day.

"But at length a sad time came, the youth was to set forth on his travels, he was at last to see the world —and joyful, indeed, was he at this fulfilment of his dearest wishes.

"Before he left, he made the young girl promise that she would be his wife, and in this promise all the hopes of her life were bound up; to him it was a pleasant thought, and nothing more.

"More than a year rolled on, during which I was fully occupied with harp and pencil, for the maiden's heart was lit up with love and hope. But my brother's task was indeed dreary, for his charge had plunged

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into every kind of dissipation, and his power was fading fast. If he drew the picture of a peaceful, happy home, with her who so truly loved him, he turned away with an impatient gesture; but if one note of the harp were sounded the youth sprang up as if he were sharply stung, and would hasten away to join the boisterous companions with whom he now spent nearly all his time. And it was in their society alone that he took any pleasure; fierce oaths were the only response to my brother's efforts to reclaim him, in the rare intervals when he was quiet and alone. At length he fell into the power of a wicked, beautiful woman; she led him on and on, and at length he married her.

"So then my brother left him in horror, for his golden harp was all unstrung, and the pages of the book were torn away. A thick, dark veil, which no hand might lift, had settled over his once light, loving heart.

"Then did my brother seek me, in the home of the Danish maiden. He entered the chamber, and saw her pale, sad face, all calm and still now upon her snowy pillow. Pure, white blossoms lay unmoved upon her bosom, for never more should joy or sorrow stir it; the gentle heart had broken, and the freed spirit had flown away to heaven, with the pure radiance of her faithful love shining like a halo round her head! And with her life my work on earth had

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ended; but it was hard to leave her, even then. I had laid my harp upon her pillow—for up to the last she had loved and listened to its melody; but the pages of the book were either untouched or blurred with tears; it had been many a long, long day since Hope had lingered there!"

The Spirit floated slowly out of the bell, and left Beatrice, for once in her life, with a mournful face. Before long she became conscious of a strange light, increasing rapidly, and on looking up, she discovered, with some consternation, that they were approaching a vast silver island. There were gigantic mountains, desolate plains, and chasms, in whose awful depths she could see lakes of molten fire glowing and seething, and occasionally throwing out masses of cinders which settled down on the dreary surface of the plains.

Everything was of silver; not a tree, not a flower, not a living creature or a drop of water anywhere. The distant roaring of fires was the only sound that broke the stillness of this wondrous shining land. Nothing, save those awful fiery lakes, had life in this untrodden solitude.

Beatrice had turned very pale, and, clinging tightly to Ariel's arm, exclaimed:

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! where *can* we have got to?"

"This is the Moon! Don't be frightened, for

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nothing can possibly harm you—and you like adventures, you know."

"The Moon! who would have thought it was such a horrid place when it looks so pretty in the sky! Where has the light gone to?—what can be the matter with it?"

"I am sure you must have learnt that the moon only shines with the reflected light of the sun," said Ariel, in a rather severe tone; "you should always try to recollect what you have been taught."

"Well, really, how could I possibly tell that I should ever come up here? And I'm sure I didn't want to know about the moon down on earth—and, what's more, I like it very much better at a distance now I *do* know. Why it's just downright horrid, there isn't even a fly to be seen!"

"I'm afraid you are a very careless child! I'm sure you have been told there is no water here, consequently no form of mortal life can exist. But there *are* living things, as I will prove to you."

So he took the somewhat unwilling girl by the hand, and led her out on to the crest of one of the vast silver mountains, down whose glittering cliffs Beatrice gazed in considerable awe. She stood on the edge of a precipice, reaching sheer down for miles—so it seemed to her—and at the bottom she saw one of the lakes of fire, whose banks were

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smoking cinders, and the ripples on whose awful surface were blue, unearthly flames.

Ariel sounded a loud call on his whistle, and from a crevice in the silver rocks came forth a cross-looking, grimy dwarf, whose tangled black beard hung nearly to his knees. He carried a heavy pickaxe on his shoulder, and when he saw Ariel's companion he growled out in a most aggrieved tone:

"Well, I never! I'm blowed if here isn't another of 'em!"

"What! *you* here, old Carbon? I expected to see one of your officers. What's the matter? I fancied you never came up here now."

"That's just where it is! That's exactly what *I* thought! And, to speak plainly, I call it hard lines to be driven out of my comfortable quarters, and sent rampaging up here at my time of life!"

"But what has put you out so much? What made you come?" inquired Ariel.

"Because that sister of yours must needs go bringing a mortal among us—the most poking-into-every-hole-and-cornerest boy I ever met with, too! I can't abide mortals, especially boys. So I was in a fine rage (though I didn't dare to offend the Princess), and asked the King's permission to come and look after the supply of coals myself. I certainly did think I should have had a little peace and quiet

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up here; but I'm no sooner comfortably settled than you go and bring another of 'em—not that it's a boy, this time—just to spite me, I suppose! I'm sure it's one of Queen Titania's freaks; and I just wish she'd leave me out of her vagaries, at any rate!"

"Speak respectfully, old fellow! Never mind; we won't stay long. I only want this young girl to see some of the wonders."

The dwarf glared vindictively at Beatrice, who, instead of being afraid, walked straight up to him and held out her hand.

"Shake a paw—do, old boy! I was so delighted to find there was anything alive up here, and I'm sure you can make yourself *so* pleasant if you like."

The dwarf first stared in speechless amazement at her audacity, then his features slowly relaxed into the grimmest of smiles, as he observed:

"Well, of all cool customers—you're about the coolest! What do you want to know, eh?"

"Everything," answered Beatrice, promptly.

"Bless me!" ejaculated the dwarf; "but what first?"

"I want to know who you are, where you live, what you do here, why the moon is made of silver, and what the fiery lakes are?"

During this speech the dwarf had been counting off the questions on his fingers, and finally observed:

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"Five of 'em! well I never! First.—Who I am? I'm Carbon, Chief of the Mineral Gnomes. Second.—I live, when I'm let alone, at the Court of the Fire King, in the centre of the earth—where that beastly young mortal is prowling about now," said he, with a sudden recollection of his wrongs. "By-the-by, have you got a brother?"

"Yes, I've two; one's in Fairyland, and the other is gone on a journey with a girl called Calorica."

"Then it *is* him!" exclaimed the dwarf. "I was sure the Queen was at the bottom of it, somehow, and she really ought to know better! Third.—I'm looking after the coals for the smelting-furnaces——"

"Coals!" interrupted Beatrice. "Where *do* you get them?"

"Bring 'em, of course! And precious hard work it is, too. Did you ever hear what you mortals call thunder?"

"Lots of times," answered she.

"Well; that's the rumbling of the coal-waggons that the gnomes are driving through the air."

"Gracious me! and what's the lightning, then?"

"Now, look here; you're getting in a lot of extra questions, you know," said the dwarf, feelingly; "and if there's a thing I hate, it's talking! Of course it's the darts of the Storm Fiends, which they throw at us to prevent our getting the coals up. Sometimes

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they succeed in upsetting a load, and then there's a pretty considerable crash. Mortals have to look out, I can tell you, for the Storm Fiends aren't at all particular where their darts go, when they get excited. Now, no more extras. Fourth.—Where do you suppose all the silver would come from if the moon were not made of it? Our gnomes are always carrying loads and loads of it down to earth, and there's never too much. Fifth.—Thank goodness, that's the last!—The lakes of fire are the smelting furnaces, where the silver is refined for the use of the whole Fairy race: they're all full of liquid metal. We just take it down in the rough, and hide it about for the mortals; and it's a deal too good for 'em, then. Now I'm off!"

So the surly old fellow disappeared as suddenly as he came; and Beatrice looking rather disconsolate, her Dream-Fairy said, consolingly:

"Never mind! I can tell you plenty more wonderful things. Look up at the stars; are they not beautiful and varied in colour?"

"Why, so they are! How very odd I never saw that before!"

"Yet the astronomers of earth are quite aware of the fact (as they are of the mountains and fiery chasms in the moon), though they cannot account for it satisfactorily. Many and many a night has

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been spent by learned sages in trying to find out the reason of these beautiful colours."

"And what *is* the reason?" asked Beatrice, highly interested.

"Each of these stars is a great globe of some precious stone—ruby, sapphire, topaz, emerald, amethyst, and all the coloured gems. The Mineral Gnomes are constantly at work, with sacks and hammers, chipping off bits of them to take down to earth. They keep the large pieces for their own use, and leave the tiny fragments, which they carefully bury, for the mortals. This is no easy task, though; and they have to restore many a sackfull, for the Storm Fiends guard these gem-stars jealously; if they did not they would soon be chipped away altogether."

"How very wonderful this is, really! And where is the home of you Dream-Fairies?"

"All space—above the clouds of earth; that is our home!"

They re-entered the crystal bell; and Beatrice, curling herself up on her sofa, thought of all she had been told, and looked with a new interest upon the moon and glittering stars. At length she started up, and in an energetic way of her own demanded:

"What is the sun? I know all about the moon, and stars, and thunder, and lightning, but you've

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never told me a single word about the sun. I'm sure it must be something queer, for everything up here turns out something quite unexpected, you know!"

"Hush," said the Dream-Fairy, reverently; "do not speak of the sun so lightly, for it is the Palace of our Great Mother. Her name, to mortals, is Nature; it is she whose laws we lovingly obey, she who fills the air with light and warmth, causing the sweet flowers and green trees to grow upon earth. None of Fairy origin ever *die*, but when they become old and weary of the turmoil of life, they call on the Great Mother to take them, and she receives them into her calm, untroubled home.

"When she hears a cry she throws down from her glorious Palace of Light a golden key—mortals often see them and call them 'falling stars.' Then the weary one mounts up, and is admitted to the centre of the sun, where they enjoy perfect rest.

"From the Great Mother's Palace flow radiant sunbeams, and these the ever-busy gnomes are constantly employed in weaving into gold. It is a ceaseless task, for gold is always needed.

"Sometimes the Great Mother leaves her palace to make a progress among far-distant worlds; she takes a long train of sunbeams with her, so that the star-gazers on earth wonder and puzzle, and say there is a splendid comet on its course. Then they adjust

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their most powerful telescopes, and spend an immense amount of time in calculations, and at the end they are just as wise as they were at the beginning; and not one bit nearer the truth than before."

"What a dreadful shame it is, though, to make us poor children learn such a lot of things that aren't true!" remarked Beatrice in an injured tone.

"I sadly fear," said Ariel, reprovingly, "that you never paid much attention to them when you thought they *were* true. Very much of what you were taught *was* true, you know."

Beatrice considered the conversation was becoming rather personal, and gave herself an impatient little shake, which Ariel noticing with a smile, laid his hand gently on her forehead. She instantly fell into a deep sleep, while the crystal bell dropped silently and swiftly down to earth again.

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OVER EARTH.

" . . . . From the hour I began it,
I found this a life full of kindness and bliss,
And until they can show me some happier planet,
More social and bright, I'll content me with this."

Moore.

WHEN Beatrice again awoke, she found that the Dream-Fairies and the crystal bell had vanished, and that Ariel alone remained. They were on a soft green bank with beautiful flowers and trees growing round them.

"Well," exclaimed she, "I'm certainly rather glad to understand about lots of things I never knew before up in those queer places, and to think I have such a dear little Dream-Fairy to look after me; but I confess it's an immense relief to be safe down here on earth again—I like this so much the best! It's *dreadfully* solemn and grand up there, you see."

"Well, yes; now that you have enjoyed the

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wonders of upper air, I suppose that you will like to keep nearer the earth's surface. We shall find a great many things to interest you, I'm sure, because you're so fond of animals."

"Yes, I am,—how I should like to be on speaking terms with them all, and able to talk to them properly! I do so want to know what they speak and think about!"

"All that can be easily managed," said Ariel.

He took out a little golden phial (just like Mossiefern's, only, of course, Beatrice did not know that), and touched her lips and ears with the liquid in it. She experienced a curious sensation for a moment, for the whole air seemed at once filled with myriads of voices; even every little insect was chatting away merrily.

"Oh! this *is* nice!" cried she, bending over a splendid large butterfly, that had just alighted on the bank near. "You pretty creature! Do you know I can understand what you say, quite well? *Do* talk to me, please."

So the butterfly shook his bright wings and answered:

"I must only stop a moment, for I hold a most important and responsible position at the Court of Flowers, and the governing body keep me pretty briskly employed, I can assure you. For we are in

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BEATRICE AND THE BUTTERFLY. (*p.* 144.)

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rather an awkward situation, just at present; Queen Titania not having yet appointed a new Queen-Regent; the late one—the Rose—having abdicated, calling to the Great Mother to take her, after a very long and successful reign. The plants of the lower orders take advantage of this crisis, and give us constant trouble. I am on my way just now from taking counsel's opinion (Serjeant Bumble-bee, a most learned man, resides in the next bank) as to a dispute between a great vulgar nettle and a white rose—a relative of the late Queen's. The impudent thing absolutely intruded himself on to her domain—and, moreover, insists on his right to remain."

"Why doesn't Queen Titania be quick, then, and send somebody to keep them in order?"

"That I cannot understand. I made precisely the same remark myself to the Serjeant while discussing the case of Rose *v.* Nettle, and he observed, somewhat rudely I thought (but these legal swells *never* have any manners), that I had much better attend to my own business, and leave the Queen's alone, for that she knew quite well what she was about."

"What a cross old bear!" exclaimed Beatrice.

"So he is; but then he's so wonderfully clever! It's quite astonishing how often clever people think good manners superfluous. But I must really ask you

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to excuse me, this decision must be at once placed in the hands of the proper authorities."

He flew quickly away, and at the same moment Beatrice heard an excited voice exclaim :

"Coco, my dear Coco! where are you? I have just heard the most extraordinary news, and I came straight here to tell you."

The speaker was a lovely little bird with pinky-white feathers and a coronet of blue and gold on her head; but Beatrice thought she had never seen such gorgeous plumage as that of the bird who answered the summons. He was a blaze of scarlet, gold, and green, the crown on his head, the scales on his legs, and his spurs, were all of gold. He had, moreover, a most consequential air, and he remarked, with much severity :

"Oisette! I regret to believe that *nothing* will ever teach you a proper amount of dignity. Your conduct, in perpetually gossipping with your subjects, is distressingly unbecoming. You are far too free and easy."

"But, my dear Coco, I assure you, I heard this news from your own ambassador—one of the two parrots that you sent to California with despatches for the orioles. *You* would have listened to him, my love!"

"Since it was my ambassador, I admit that, for

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once, you were not to blame in listening. And now, pray, what is this mighty piece of news?"

"Who *do* you suppose they saw there?"

"How should *I* know," said Coco, disdainfully.

"Oh! it's all very well to toss your head in that manner!" replied Oisette, rather nettled; you wouldn't toss it if that person came here! You'd have to be meek enough then, *I* know!"

"You don't mean to say they saw our Prince?"

"But I do though! And that was not the strangest part of it. The Prince was taking charge of a mortal girl!"

"Eh?" cried Coco, his eyes nearly starting out of his head with surprise. "Oh, nonsense! I don't believe it!"

"Don't, then, if you'd rather not—of course! Only even the parrots couldn't believe their own eyes, and they got their information from the white owl that carried the maiden."

"Now, Oisette," said Coco, impressively, with his head very much on one side, "be careful! On your honour, do you mean to affirm that my ambassador told you that he saw our sovereign Prince travelling with a mortal girl, and that mortal making use of one of the Queen's owls?"

"I assure you that it is so, and you had better

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come at once and grant an audience to the parrots and hear all about it for yourself."

They flew rapidly away, and Beatrice exclaimed:

"Oh, it must have been one of my sisters they saw."

"They have met with Violet and Mossiefern," answered Ariel.

"Dear me! is Mossiefern a Prince? I'd no idea he was such a swell! How funny it is to hear of one's relatives in this unexpected way! And only just think of Violet's riding about on a white owl!"

This last idea so tickled Beatrice's fancy that she went off into peal after peal of merry laughter. When she had sufficiently enjoyed the joke, she observed:

"By-the-by, what an important fellow that Coco is! How astonished he would have been if he had caught sight of me. I wonder if he would have been as cross as old Carbon? But who is he, and why did he scold his wife so?"

"He is the King-Regent of sylvan birds, and Oisette is his consort," replied Ariel.

"King-Regent — sylvan birds — what *does* that mean?"

"If you can be attentive for two minutes, and keep still instead of incessantly hopping about, as

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you are doing at present, I can explain it all to you," said Ariel.

"Well, be quick, then; I hate long explanations, and I'm always sure to forget half of them."

Ariel looked at her so reproachfully that she felt she must either be downright rude or attend to him, so she chose the latter course.

"The great Fairy race is divided into two principal kingdoms——"

"Oh, dear!" said Beatrice, dolefully, "that's *so* like geography."

"The first and greatest of these kingdoms," went on Ariel, disregarding the interruption, "is that under the rule of Queen Titania, which embraces the government of all spirits above the surface of the earth—those of the woods, the air, and the waters. The second kingdom is in the centre of the earth, under the dominion of the Fire King; and his subjects are much more fierce and warlike than the others, but, in their way, quite as useful. They include the industrious and powerful race of the Mineral Gnomes, who, though rough-mannered and unsociable, as you have found, are not absolutely vindictive, unless interfered with too much."

"And over all, as you know, the Great Mother reigns supreme."

"But now, you haven't told me about the King-

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Regent and the sylvan birds," said Beatrice, with another hop, which she tried to suppress, as she caught Ariel's accusing glance.

"The most important department of Queen Titania's kingdom is that of the Woodland-Elves. Its ruler is her eldest son, who will succeed her when she resigns. This department comprises also the charge of the animals, insects, and sylvan birds (sylvan means belonging to woods); and Coco, whom you have just seen, is their Governor, or King-Regent.

"Those birds that soar high over barren rocks, or sea-coasts, belong to the next division—air—which is presided over by the second Prince, and the Eagle is *their* King.

"There is also the department of the Flowers; and just now, as you have heard, there is an interregnum—the Rose's successor not being yet appointed—though the Queen has fixed her heart on one particular person."

"Oh, do tell me who it's to be!" cried Beatrice.

"I must not reveal state secrets," replied Ariel; "but we shall all know in good time; and the flowers do not really suffer, for they are under energetic government."

"Well," said Beatrice, "I really do hope I shan't forget all this in five minutes; but it's awfully com-

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plicated, and dreadfully like a lesson at home, you know."

She flew onwards, Ariel following her, and she continued to receive the greatest delight from listening to the voices of the birds and insects. Those of the flowers were so very low that she could hardly hear them, but this did not annoy her much, for she found they only talked about themselves; though, as she considerately remarked:

"One really can't blame them, poor things, much, for they are always obliged to stick in one place, so they can't be expected to have many ideas."

She alighted at last in a pretty garden, and watched a sweet-looking young girl feeding some white doves, to whom she addressed many caressing words.

And it did seem such a pity that the little creatures could not understand her, nor she them, though they talked most lovingly of her care and kindness, and seemed such grateful little things that Beatrice longed to give the girl the same advantages as herself. But Ariel said this could not be done; nevertheless, he waved his hand over the girl's head, and it was evident that the sense, if not the actual words, of the doves' language became plain to her, for a happy, contented smile lighted up her face.

"Now you know," said Beatrice, emphatically,

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"I'm quite tired of birds and insects; I want to talk to some four-legged animals, and I should like to begin with a horse—a regular jolly horse that has had lots of adventures!"

"I think I know of one that would suit you; but he lives a long way off—farther than you could fly—so when you feel tired tell me, and you shall have a white owl to carry you, like your sister's."

"Oh! that would be capital fun! I'm sure I feel quite tired now," she added, earnestly.

Ariel smiled, and giving a loud call on his whistle, down flew the great, white, strong bird.

"Well, this is delicious!" cried she, settling herself comfortably among the soft feathers on its back. "It wasn't true, I suppose, what Coco said about white owls only belonging to the Queen? She won't be angry at our having this one, will she?"

"Oh, no," said Ariel, smiling again; "I will take good care of that. Now, I will fly by your side, and when you are really tired I will send you off into a deep sleep, from which you will not awake until our journey's end."

This seemed an excellent plan to Beatrice; but it was not in her nature to be long without asking questions, so she presently sat up and called out:

"Ariel!"

"I am listening," answered he.

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"I was thinking about what you told me, that the Queen's eldest son reigns over the woods and everything in them. There surely can't be much left for the others, then?"

"Oh, yes, there is," replied he; "the second Prince has charge of all birds, as I told you, who do not make their homes in woods; and he has the Dream-Fairies also. And again, the Storm Spirits are, to a certain extent, under his control, though they can hardly be called his subjects, having originally belonged to the dominion of the Fire King.

"They had a great rebellion and established a sort of government of their own; acknowledging no sovereign in particular, but liable to checks from all the ruling powers, if they behave badly. The third Prince reigns over the nymphs who inhabit fountain or brooklet, as well as lake or river, and also the myriad beings that dwell in the wide ocean."

"And is there no Princess?"

"Yes, one who is betrothed to the Fire King, and a younger one, still a child."

"Oh, that poor eldest one! It must be a horrid look-out for her, I should say! He must be so dreadfully grumpy—at least, if he's anything like old Carbon. And oh, dear, dear! why he lives in the centre of the earth, and she'll have to go too! I do pity her—no end!"

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"The King is wonderfully handsome, most devotedly attached to her, and I assure you the Princess does not in the least regret her choice."

And then, seeing Beatrice's eyes were growing heavy, he waved her off into a motionless, dreamless sleep.

She woke in a finely-timbered park within sight of a large country-house, and for a few moments she could not see any particular reason for having stopped there, until Ariel, touching her shoulder, pointed to a clump of trees, beneath whose shade stood a chestnut horse.

"Oh!" cried she, "is that the horse with the adventures that you told me of?"

"Yes; go up to him, and ask him to tell you his story."

She ran fearlessly up to the horse, and he looked down at her with his soft, intelligent eyes.

"What a beautiful creature!" whispered Beatrice.

"He was one of the most perfect of his race," answered Ariel, "though old age has now thickened his graceful limbs, and dimmed the fire and spirit of his eyes."

Beatrice looked admiringly up at him, saying, respectfully:

"We have come a long, long way to find you, for I wanted so much to hear the story of your ad-

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ventures. Will you please be so kind as to tell it me?"

"That I will gladly do, little maiden; for you must think kindly of our race to have learnt our language, and to have come so far to see me.

"Well, then; many, many years ago, I was a wild colt, roaming over the American prairies with a numerous herd of my own race; all free, beautiful creatures, who had never once known what it was to obey the will of man. I ate of the soft green grass, gambolled all day with my young companions, and never, by night or day, had a thought or care to trouble me. But one terrible day a strange smell came up on the air, dense masses of clouds rose on the horizon, and the elders of our herd cried in terror:

"'Fly! fly for your lives! the prairie is on fire!'

"Away we dashed, though we young ones hardly realised the full meaning of those awful words. We flew over the plain, but even yet more swiftly came the wall of smoke and fire after us,—the air was scorching and laden with suffocating vapour, as mile after mile of the tall waving grass curled and roared in the devouring flames. It was, indeed, a fearsome sight!

"I remember well with what a shudder I heard the despairing shriek of one of our herd, who had stumbled and fallen, and in a moment the mighty fire swept over him, and he perished miserably!

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"My senses seemed failing—my breath came in short gasps—when all at once I became conscious that I had separated from my companions, and was galloping on before that awful foe—alone!

"Oh! the agony of that moment! The fire was close upon me, and my limbs, of whose matchless speed I had been so proud, were trembling under me; my strength was spent! I felt the last moment had well-nigh come, when I beheld a little valley close below me, and at the bottom ran a smooth broad river—I was saved!

"My exhausted limbs bore me to the bank, I plunged wildly in, I just remember listening to the roaring of the flames, baffled and arrested by the water, and making one desperate effort, I gained the opposite shore, where I fell down—insensible.

"When I came to myself, I found I was lying on the grass near a tent, and over me a noble-looking man was bending, trying to pour some liquid down my throat. I am describing this, as I know now it all happened; but *then* my one feeling was of wild unreasoning terror, I endeavoured to struggle to my feet and fly, for I had always been taught to look on men as my relentless foes, and had been told horrible tales of their cruelty and tyranny when they succeeded in taking captive any of our noble, free-born race. But the thought of flight was useless. I had hurt some

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sinew in my frantic efforts to climb the river bank, and the slightest movement caused me acute agony.

"There was no choice, I was forced to submit to the young man's kind words and still kinder caresses.

"He fed me always with his own hands, gathering for me tufts of the sweetest grass, stroking my neck gently the while, so that at last I grew to allow his patting me without starting and snorting in terror.

"Day after day went on, and though I could bear no other being to come near me, I permitted him at last to put on a saddle and bridle, and even to mount me—though this he never attempted to do until my strength was fully restored.

"To make a long story short, my master and I became the closest friends, but up to this day no other has ever dared to ride me. He was a soldier, and I bore him to the front in victory, and shared his tent on the battle-field. More than once I have saved his life when attacked by Indians; for if we camped for the night in any lonely spot and I heard some suspicious sound, I used to stamp and neigh to rouse him, and we soon left the treacherous enemy far behind.

"But one day my vigilance was useless, for as we went slowly through the forest, to the city where my master's regiment was stationed, an Indian darted suddenly from the bushes, I heard the sharp report of a pistol, felt the reins drop, as with a low groan my

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beloved rider fell to the ground. The coward who had done the deed galloped instantly away. With the deepest anxiety I smelt my dear master's face and ascertained that he still lived, and like lightning I darted away to the city, only stopping at the barracks, rousing attention by neighing loudly.

"They saw fresh blood on my reins and saddle, and at once took the alarm, so that in a few minutes the surgeon and a dozen men were ready to start. I did not allow myself to be caught, but galloped on, leading them straight to the place where my dear master still lay insensible.

"Well! he recovered, and vowed, that as he owed his life to my sagacity and affection, we should never more be parted.

"Years have passed since then, and my once fleet limbs are stiff and feeble, but I live in this lovely place, at rest for the remainder of my life.

"Hands softer and whiter than my dear master's caress me now, for he married a beautiful young girl. 'Tis she who brings me daily dainties, and clear, merry voices call for me to come—there is a group of bonny children round her now."

Here the old horse pricked his ears, and moved away, for a child called:

"Bayard! Bayard! Come for thy sugar!"

Beatrice saw a lady and gentleman coming from

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the house, with several merry little people running by them. She turned to Ariel, and said:

"Bayard! '*sans peur et sans reproche*'—what a good name for him, the dear, faithful, clever fellow! But he has a beautiful home, and is loved as he deserves to be. I am so glad to know that!"

Ariel smiled at her earnest sympathy, remarking:

"But I must remind you that our journey is nearly over. In a very short time ends our appointed period of a year and a day!"

"Oh! it *can't* be! Why, we haven't been a week yet!" said Beatrice, with a look of blank consternation.

"You do not think of our distant journey in the Realm of Dreams, that took up nearly all our time."

"But I haven't talked to one single doggie yet," said she, in a tone of deep injury. "I *must* see a dog, you know!"

"If you were once among the dogs, I should never get you back to the Fairy cottage! But you forget that you may choose your own future; if you decide on being a Fairy, you will have plenty of time to talk to all the dogs and animals in the world."

"Then I shall certainly choose to be a Fairy!" cried she, her face brightening considerably.

Ariel put her on the owl and sent her off to sleep.

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How long she slept she of course could not tell, but Ariel's voice awoke her by saying :

"Beatrice, I think I see some work for you to do," and directed the owl to set her down by the open door of a farm-house.

Looking in she saw a wretched little kitten which had just been rescued from drowning in a milk-pan, into which it had tumbled head first.

The woman who picked it out looked terribly angry, and dropping the shivering little animal, she looked about for something to beat it with, scolding all the time.

But Beatrice quickly caught up the kitten, and the woman could not imagine where it had gone to.

Very much puzzled, she returned grumbling to her work, while Beatrice improved the occasion by administering a severe lecture to the culprit on the wickedness of theft and its probable consequences.

Having recommended it to return at once to its mother, she made the little thing quite warm and dry again with a few touches, and watched it as it scampered into the next room, where lay old Mrs. Puss, fast asleep, having just disposed of a most comfortable dinner.

On the edge of her plate sat a poor little mouse, who, though obviously in a terrible fright, was hastily picking up some scraps—it did look so miserably hungry!

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The kitten was just going to make a pounce, when Beatrice gave it a most energetic slap, exclaiming:

"You bad, wicked, ungrateful, hard-hearted little wretch! Have I not just saved you from a beating, and talked to you like a book? And to think of your trying directly to catch that poor little mouse, who is only taking what you have left!"

She gave the kitten a good shake, and dropped it quite angrily, the mouse having prudently vanished into its hole. She took a crust of bread, and pushing it as far into the hole as she could, remarked:

"There, mousie! there's plenty of dinner for you, but how very foolish you were to venture on to the cat's plate! Only just think where you'd have gone to if she had woke up!"

"But I was so terribly hungry, and I've nine little ones at home!" pleaded the mouse, piteously.

"And if you get yourself eaten up, what do you suppose will become of your babies, you unfeeling thing? It's your duty to take proper care of yourself, and I'm quite ashamed of you!"

Then Beatrice, feeling she had done all that was needed, remounted her owl, who sailed steadily away with her, many a league, until they arrived safely in the garden of the Fairy cottage.

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THIRD JOURNEY.

NINA AND AQUARILLO.

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WITH THE WATER-NYMPHS.

"Morn, noon, and eve, that boat of pearl outran
The streams which bore it, like the arrowy cloud
Of tempest, or the speedier thought of man,
Which flieth forth, and cannot make abode.
Sometimes thro' forests deep like night we glode,
Between the walls of mighty mountains crown'd
With Cyclopean piles, whose turrets proud,
The homes of the departed dimly frown'd
O'er the bright waves that girt their dark foundations round."

Shelley.

NINA and Aquarillo floated down the brook, away from the Fairy garden, and she lay cosily back in the boat, and watched the bright insects darting over the surface of the water, and the fishes eyeing them greedily. Before long, the brook deepened and widened considerably, and Nina rather wondered what a distant roaring noise could be; they seemed also to be going along much faster.

She was not surprised that the little boat glided on without oar or sail, for she had a proper and complete

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faith in Fairy power, and was quite prepared to take everything as a matter of course. Still, it was certainly rather a shock to her, when Aquarillo observed coolly:

"Do you hear that roaring? It is the noise of the water-fall down which we are just going to the Palace of the Water-Nymphs."

"Going down a waterfall!" exclaimed she, rather aghast; "dear me, won't it be very uncomfortable?"

"Not in the least. Why, Nina, I'm ashamed of you! I did not expect you to be a coward! Come, touch your lips, ears, and eyes with this liquid, and you'll feel more at your ease."

Nina took the little gold bottle and did so, when, like Beatrice, she at once heard the murmur of thousands of tiny voices, and looking over the side of the boat, she saw the graceful forms of the Water-Nymphs who were pushing it on, and they smiled up at her, knowing that now she could see and speak to them.

Faster still sped on the little boat, louder grew the roar of the waters, and Nina could not possibly help clinging tightly to the sides of the boat—for there came a swift rush, and then one wild bound over the edge of the cataract—Nina shut her eyes and gasped, but she felt nothing beyond the sudden stopping of the boat; she heard sounds of sweet music, and Aquarillo's voice calling to her;—she ventured to

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open her eyes, and found herself safe in the Palace of the Water-Nymphs!

It was such a beautiful sight! She was inside a vast dome of falling crystal water, glittering with every hue of the rainbow, and resembling a perpetual shower of precious-stones. Overhead and all round quivered the ever-varying colours. Exactly under the centre of the dome stood a throne of silver, festooned with feathery water-plants, and on this throne sat the Queen. She had long robes of shining silver-tissue, her dark hair was bound by a garland of water-lilies, and round her slender throat hung rows of fine pearls, gathered from fresh-water mussels. As Aquarillo entered she descended from her throne and bowed respectfully. He said something to her in a low tone, upon which she turned to Nina with a kind smile.

"Welcome, little maiden, to the home of the Water-Nymphs. I will show you very gladly all that may amuse you, if——" but at this moment she was interrupted by a Water-Nymph, who looked pale and agitated.

"A thousand pardons, your Majesty! but my case is urgent. A young trout has this moment arrived in a state of great alarm, to claim your advice and protection, a pike having just eaten up his venerable parent!"

"Order out a company of soldiers, let them accom-

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pany the bereaved fish without loss of time, to seek out and destroy the miscreant!"

The Nymph bowed and withdrew, while the Queen observed to Aquarillo:

"I assure you there is no end to the difficulties I have with these lawless pike! I shall be obliged, either to entreat your interference, or else exterminate them altogether."

Nina, meanwhile, was employed in watching the guard of soldiers turn out to avenge the trout, with great curiosity; the warriors were clad in stout armour, being large cray-fish, each bearing a sharp lance in his claw. The poor little trout was in their midst, looking very uncomfortable, and through the ever-moving transparent walls of the palace, Nina could distinctly see a vast concourse of small fishes, staring with wide-open eyes at the proceedings within.

The Queen, having finished her conversation with Aquarillo, went up to Nina, and said:

"Now, little woman! I think that, perhaps for our first visit, you would like to go and see one of the oldest of our race, the Kelpie Queen."

"I should very much indeed, thank you," replied Nina, who was well-read in Fairy lore—"only—Isn't she rather fierce?"

"She was so once, but she is quiet enough now, and is working out the penance set her by the Great

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Mother, for her merciless cruelty. But she did one good deed, and for the sake of that, she will be eventually pardoned, otherwise she would have been destroyed."

Then, at a sign from their mistress, the attendant Nymphs brought in an equipage, which, though most elegant and comfortable, was decidedly uncommon. It was a great bivalve shell of gleaming mother-of-pearl, the lower half lined with cushions of pink silk and drawn by a brilliant team of fifty gold and silver fish.

Aquarillo handed in the Queen and Nina, then entered himself and closed the shell, ordering the fishes to proceed as he did so. Nina found it perfectly delicious, for the two lids being very hollow, there was plenty of room, and she nestled cosily down among the soft pillows, gazing up admiringly at the brilliant phosphorescent star which shone in the centre of the upper shell.

"Oh!" exclaimed she, "how lovely this is! What is that beautiful star made of?"

"One of the phosphorescent fish you have so often seen sparkling on the sea. The Water-Nymphs always use them for light when necessary."

Then Nina thought again how pleasant it was, and wondered if her sisters had such a delicious carriage provided for them, and finally fell fast asleep.

She awoke at the stopping of the shell, and as it

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opened she found they were in a great, silent hall, whose walls of cold polished steel were engraved with many strange devices, and the roof, through which came the only light, dim and subdued, was of dark, motionless blue, and was, in fact, the under surface of the deepest lake in Scotland.

At the upper end of this strange, mysterious hall were three female figures, their faces beautiful, but inexpressibly sad and mournful. They wore robes of dark blue, richly embroidered, and their fair hair fell in plaited tresses to their knees, and on their heads were coronets of gold.

All three bent silently over a long strip of silver tissue which the elder lady was deftly embroidering with shining spangles, while the two younger ones carefully guided the work for the ever-moving fingers. They neither looked up nor spoke, and were utterly noiseless and motionless, save for the slow moving of the shining fabric, as the busy needle flew out and in. Nina's heart felt both awe and pity as she watched them, and she whispered:

"They are so silent and so sad! Who are they, and what are they doing?"

"These are the once-dreaded Kelpie Queen and her daughters, working out in silent penitence the long task assigned them by the Great Mother—but it is nearly ended now."

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"What did they do to have such a terribly long punishment?"

"For hundreds of years the Kelpie Queen and her daughters gave themselves up to reckless persecution of the human race, because the eldest and favourite Princess had once been beloved, and then forgotten by a mortal knight.

"Their revenge was indiscriminate; not content with destroying the family of the offending knight, they spared neither innocent nor helpless, but seized and drowned all who came within their reach.

"Therefore, the Great Mother declared she would destroy them with her sword of flame, scarcely ever used, for she is very lenient. But the one good deed of the Kelpie's life saved her—she had relented towards a mortal Queen, far more helpless and quite as unfortunate as herself.

"This Queen, escaping from her prison by water, was in the Kelpie's power. But it was her hour of mercy; she guided the boat in safety, and received and hid the prison keys, which were thrown into the lake. And though her aid was of no avail, for the beautiful Queen perished miserably upon the scaffold afterwards, still, the Great Mother accepted the will for the deed, and the Kelpie's sentence of death was recalled.

"She and her daughters were compelled to weave

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and embroider daily, for a long, long period of years, that glittering path of silver which you see laid over the ocean on moonlight nights; and as fresh ones are constantly required, the labour is without cessation or variety."

"Oh, I never had the least idea before what that silvery path over the sea really was!" cried Nina, eagerly; "and will it never come again when their punishment is over?"

"Yes; for there are unfortunately many, even among our peace-loving race, who need chastising —some of the Storm and Fire Spirits are very wicked."

Nina was replaced in her pink-lined shell, and looked wistfully back for the last time at the Kelpie Queen and her daughters, who had not shown either by word or sign that they were conscious of their presence.

Aquarillo told her that the Queen of the Water-Nymphs was about to take them to visit the source of a great river down whose whole course they would travel until they reached the sea.

So the shell re-opened on a tiny little lake, overshadowed by beautiful trees, and far in the depths of a wood. The Queen asked Nina to walk with her a little way to a pretty spring, which bubbled up merrily among mossy stones and graceful ferns.

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NINA AND AQUARILLO AT THE FAIRY WELL. (p. 173.)

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"This spot is known far and near as the 'Fairy Well,'" said the Queen; "its guardian spirit keeps watch over those who love one another very dearly. Many a lover, about to start on a long journey, brings hither his betrothed, and drinks some of the water from the palm of her hand, which is almost sure to compel his fidelity. For if the Fairy of the Well can possibly manage it, she keeps them true to one another, and very rarely fails, for the Dream-Fairies always help her."

Nina immediately inquired, with great interest, who the Dream-Fairies were? and this having been duly explained, they re-entered the shell; Nina having not the smallest notion that her sister Beatrice was travelling about with these beings at that very moment.

When the shell again opened, they were gliding down a wide beautiful river in brilliant moonlight. Myriads of living things filled both air and water, nightingales sang sweetly in the woods, glow-worms sparkled on the banks, and Nina felt that night was neither sad nor lonely. She particularly noticed multitudes of tiny elves, who, kneeling on the broad leaves of the water-lilies, were busily employed in filling crystal syringes. They were perpetually coming and going, using for steeds great shining dragon-flies, whom they guided with gossamer reins. One small

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Elf, more audacious than the rest, rode right up to the shell, staring in great amazement at Nina, though he departed abruptly when he caught sight of her two companions.

"The ill-mannered little wretch!" cried Aquarillo, "that is surely one of Bluette's children! they are shockingly brought up; I must really speak to my brother about it!"

Nina had not listened to this speech, for she was eagerly waiting to ask what the Elves were doing with the dragon-flies and syringes.

"They are the young Elves, who are constantly employed watering the plants and flowers after the sun goes down. You mortals call this process the dew falling, and without it vegetation would soon be parched up."

She turned this idea over in her mind, and the Queen added:

"If a rose that has been washed with the water of a Fairy Well be given by one person to another, they cannot help loving each other. Many friendships have arisen in this way, but such gifts are rare. Fairy Wells and true friendships are neither of them common things."

Nina considered this subject rather out of her line, so she turned to watch the long train of gold and silver fish, five abreast, who were drawing them

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swiftly through the water. By-and-by day began to break, and just as their glittering team turned round a projecting point of the shore, she saw before them in the distance the calm, beautiful sea, rippling grey in the light of the early dawn.

They had reached the mouth of the river. A fleet of brown-sailed fishing-boats was near them, and as the shell of pearl and its three inmates glided among them, it seemed very odd that they were quite unnoticed.

But Nina started back as she became suddenly aware that they were watched by a savage-looking creature in a rough boat, who had come close up to them. He had some heavy nets fastened to his boat and dragging after it, and his raiment was of the scantiest. He, also, looked with great astonishment at Nina, but after a rough obeisance to her companions, went silently on his way.

"Oh dear! I'm so glad he's gone!" exclaimed Nina, "what a horrid-looking man! Who can he be? Not a Fairy, surely?"

"Not a *Fairy*, certainly!" laughed Aquarillo, "since he is decidedly not a female; but he is a sort of Fay, being the Guardian Spirit of this river, and, in fact, quite a right-hand man to the Queen."

"That indeed he is," said she, cordially. "He is most useful in seeing that my subjects here are treated

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properly; there are few that have a kinder heart, rough as he looks. Those nets, for instance, that he drags after him, are full of fishes, who, from having been particularly good all their lives, are exempted from being caught. So when the fishing-boats are out, the River Spirit is always there with his nets, into which the good fishes swim for safety."

"Who would have thought he was so kind!" remarked Nina; "he looks the most utterly unpleasant old thing!"

"I know too," went on the Queen, "that he goes out of his way to do good, for, if any fisherman takes too much to drink, and ill-treats his wife and family, the old River Spirit takes care that he is punished by not catching any fish for a day or two. But he also invariably manages on these occasions that the wife should find a little money that she did not know of—hidden somewhere."

"Well, it's a pity he doesn't *look* nicer, at any rate!" said Nina.

"It's usually very unsafe to trust to outward appearances," observed the Queen, morally, "and I think I can show you something to impress the fact on your memory."

On went the shell, leaving in its wake a track of sparkling wavelets, and in a very short time they were opposite a large town, and Nina could see the

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forest of tall masts within the harbour. Alongside the pier, close to them, lay a boat of varnished wood, with cushions and yoke-lines of crimson, and the four neatly-dressed sailors belonging to her had the name "Amphion" on their Jerseys and hats.

"A yacht's gig!" exclaimed Nina, "and here are the people coming to go in it," added she, inelegantly.

Two young men and two ladies got into the gig and went off to the pretty schooner-yacht lying-to at a little distance.

The vessel was soon under weigh, moving rapidly along before an increasing breeze. Swiftly flew the Fairy shell by the schooner's side, and at first Nina observed the two ladies chatting merrily on deck, and saying how delightful it was. Very soon, however, they had left the shelter of the land, and the schooner began to plunge and dance in a manner that her proud owner described as "lively." But it certainly had no corresponding effect on the ladies, who became more and more depressed and silent. Just then a dapper little man popped his head up the companion with the information:

"Lunch quite ready, sir; biled leg of mutton and nice suet dumpling to foller, sir."

The faces of the two ladies immediately assumed a pale green shade, and they suddenly disappeared, while Nina guessed, from sad experience, what had

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happened to them. Aquarillo held her up to two side-lights; through the one she beheld the sisters lying helpless and miserable in the after-cabin; through the other she saw the two young men enjoying their lunch most comfortably.

"Nasty selfish things!" exclaimed Nina, indignantly, "when those two poor things are so wretched!"

"Ah! it will *not* do to trust to appearances, will it?" said the Queen, with a smile. "And now, dear, I must bid you good-bye; for Aquarillo wants to take you to see a sister of mine, who lives far away, and in whom I hope you will be interested."

Nina kissed and thanked her very gratefully, and saw her pass rapidly away through the water with much regret.

"Where are you going to take me to, now?"

"To a noble river, whose guardian Spirit is a most beautiful Princess, who was very celebrated—unhappily quite as much for her cruelty as her wonderful beauty; so she, also, incurred the displeasure of the Great Mother. But she repented in time, and for many years has led a perfectly quiet, harmless life in her own palace beneath the river."

"Please tell me its name and the Princess's."

"The river is the Rhine, and the Princess Lurline, or, as she is called in her native German, 'Lörelei.'"

"But what shall I do? I'm afraid I can't speak

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German *nearly* well enough," said poor Nina, much dismayed.

"All of Fairy race speak every language with equal ease; it makes no difference to them," replied Aquarillo.

"Then Fairy children never have to learn any horrid grammar! Oh dear, how nice it must be to be a Fairy, to be sure!"

Then the shell closed down, and Nina remembered nothing more until Aquarillo's voice aroused her, and she started up in amazement. It was a glorious moonlight night, and they were floating down a broad river, which flowed rapidly between vine-clad hills, nearly every green height being crowned with some grand old ruin, whose grey walls stood out in relief against the starry sky.

It was a dreamy, beautiful scene; and in the river itself were groups of lovely Water-Nymphs, playing round the Fairy shell, and singing songs of welcome to the little mortal maiden, to the soft music of their silver lyres. They were guiding the team of fishes towards a great bare rock, rising in the centre of the stream, and Nina could see a ray of light shining as if from a crevice in it. The crevice appeared to widen, the light glowed more brightly, and the shell floating safely in, Nina found herself face to face with the far-famed Lörelei.

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The great hall in which she dwelt was entirely of rock-crystal, reflecting the thousand torches carried by the Water-Nymphs at every point in gorgeous prismatic colours. Lights gleamed and flashed alike from floor and roof and pillared walls.

But the Queen—the Lörelei—was the most beautiful thing in this beautiful place. Stately and tall clad in robes of cloth of gold, with hair as brightly golden falling even to her feet; her serene, exquisite face, with its sapphire, blue eyes, looked calmly on the awe-struck child, while the diadem of jewels on her head flashed and sparkled so that Nina could hardly bear to look at it. By the side of her crystal throne played a magic fountain, whose waters poured forth continual melody.

The Lörelei would have risen to greet Aquarillo, but he begged her to remain seated, and she then called to Nina, and made room for her by her side, saying gently:

"So you are not afraid to visit me, little maid?"

"No, indeed. I don't see anything to be in the least afraid of," replied the child, gazing up confidently into the calm, lovely face.

"Ah, well! I am thankful to say that passion and anger have passed away from me for ever! But I was to be feared once. I had a wonderful power in my song, and I sat on the rocks singing; so that

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all who looked upon my face, or listened to my beguiling strains, were wrecked, and perished miserably. So now I never sing; my voice and I are at rest for ever. But, little one, now you have come so far to see me, would you not like to hear a song of the Rhine?"

"Oh, so very much! if it would not tire you."

"No; as I told you, I never sing now. Every hill and ruin here has some legend, but most of these you can read in mortal books—nor would you have time to hear them now; so we will choose merely a simple Rhine song, which you may not know, perhaps."

And making a sign to the fountain by her throne, from the centre jet rang out, in the clearest, sweetest tones, the following words:

"Three students traversed one day the Rhine,
To taste of the housewife's beer and wine.

"'Good dame! strong ale and beer thou hast got,
But without thy fair daughter we prize it not!'

"'Alas! the wine is both strong and clear,
But my daughter lies on the mourning bier!'

"In the darkened chamber they enter all
Where the maiden lay 'neath the sable pall.

"The first raised the veil o'er her face that lies,
And gazed on her features with tear-dimmed eyes!

"'Ah, could'st thou, sweet maiden, once more have breath,
I'd cherish thee, love thee, even till death!'

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"The second veiled her who so calmly slept,
And turned him away—for the strong man wept.

"'Oh, maiden, I've loved thee for many a year,
And liest thou now on the cold death-bier!'

"The third came forward; he raised the veil,
And kissed, all softly, her lips so pale.

"'I've loved thee my life long, I love thee to-day,
I'll love thee, sweet maiden, for ever and aye!'"

"That is but a sad song for you," said the Lörelei, "but there is very much to make us mournful here. Listen to another written of me in the days of my wickedness, and you will hardly wonder that I am sorrowing."

Then the voice of the Fairy fountain rang out once more—

"I know not what it forbodeth,
But heavy and sad am I,
And a picture strange of the olden times
Comes ever before mine eye.
The air is cool and the twilight comes,
The Rhine flows calmly on,
And the crests of the mountains glitter
In the light of the evening sun.

"The beauteous maiden sitteth
Above all wondrous fair;
Her golden robes are brilliant,
She combs her golden hair:
With golden comb she combeth it,
The while a song sings she—
That song it hath a mighty power,
A wondrous melody!"

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"The boatman in his little skiff
Hears it with wonder wild,
He sees not the treacherous river-rocks,
His look on high beguil'd.
Methinks the strong waves will o'erwhelm,
The boat and man ere long,
And this, O Lörelei, hast thou done
With thy betraying song."

The cadence of the song died away, the flashing torches grew faint and fainter. Nina rubbed her eyes hard, but she was safe in her pink nest, and the phosphorescent star was shining overhead. She rubbed her eyes again, raised herself on her elbow, but it was quite useless: the beautiful calm face had vanished, no fountain rang out sweet melody, the palace of crystal, with its myriad bright hues, were all gone!

She was quite alone, and knew that she was travelling rapidly, for she heard the swish of the water outside; and lying back, exceedingly bewildered, to think it all over, she came to the conclusion that she had been very much ill-treated, whisked unceremoniously away, while she was enjoying herself thoroughly, and not even allowed time to thank the stately and beautiful Lörelei.

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UNDER OCEAN.

"What hid'st thou in thy treasure caves and cells,
Thou ever-sounding and mysterious main?
Pale, glistening pearls, and rainbow-coloured shells,
Bright things which gleam, unrecked of and in vain!
But more—the billows and the depths have more—
High hearts and brave are gathered to thy breast,
They hear not now the booming waters roar,
The battle's thunder will not break their rest!"—*Hemans.*

"REALLY! it's very extraordinary! I shall certainly ask Aquarillo the meaning of it!" said Nina, and called out his name loudly. He came at once and asked what was the matter? "I want to know why I was suddenly taken away without being told, and without saying good-bye to the Lörelei; she must have thought me dreadfully rude, only I suppose she knows it isn't my fault, and I did so want to hear that fountain sing again," added she, with a sudden change from the indignant to the pathetic.

"Don't be vexed, Nina dear! If you decide on remaining a Fairy, you will have plenty of time to listen to the Rhine legends; you can stay as long as

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you like, and it will be a good while before you have heard them all."

"I shall certainly decide to be a Fairy; I like it all so much, particularly knowing all the languages without the trouble of learning them."

"What a lazy child you must be!" laughed Aquarillo, "but in the meantime you have yet much to see before the year and the day is over, and we are due again at the Fairy cottage."

He quitted the shell, and Nina felt that they were sinking through the water with great rapidity. Deeper and deeper she seemed to be going, and just as she was beginning to be very uncomfortable (for she was somewhat of a coward), the shell stopped, opened, and Nina walked out of it on to the bottom of the ocean.

Overhead was a beautiful cloudless sky, only green instead of blue, and Nina knew it was the sea, for bright-hued fishes darted about in it as birds did in the upper air; her feet rested on the finest golden sand, and there were trees, and plants, and flowers, only all of sea-weed.

They were standing before a pair of great gates of mother-of-pearl, with shining walls of the same, stretching right and left as far as she could see. Aquarillo knocked at the gates, saying gravely:

"I bring you to this place first, because I want you to remember about it all your life."

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The great doors opened slowly, and, to Nina's astonishment, she beheld a beautiful, extensive cemetery.

Thousands of tombs were there, of shells, coral, or mother-of-pearl, and each had a little bower of sea-weed drooping over it. There was no sound or movement, nor any living being save the old, old man who had opened the gates, whose snowy hair and beard, and clear, honest blue eyes, impressed Nina pleasantly, though his face was very still and grave. He wore long white robes, and a great silver key hung at his girdle.

"Oh, who is he?" whispered the child; "and what is this cemetery?"

"Ah, little maid," replied the old man, who had overheard the whisper, "I don't wonder that you ask, though I make no doubt you have often heard my name before. I am Davy Jones, and sailors call this beautiful cemetery 'Davy Jones's locker.' We're seldom mentioned with much respect, and very few have any idea how carefully the Sea-Nymphs keep the graves of the drowned down here."

"Is this where those who are lost at sea lie buried, then?" inquired Nina.

"Just so, my little maid. We have many noble names here, and I can show you two royal tombs which will interest you. But the graves of those who

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have fallen in battle are not in this place; no doubt you will visit them afterwards."

"Now, lazy little girl," cried Aquarillo, "tell me what royal Englishman was drowned at sea?"

"Oh, I know!" cried she, after a moment's thought. "It was that poor Prince Henry—and his father never smiled again, you know! What a pity he could not see this beautiful place—perhaps he would not have minded so much then."

In a few moments they stood before an exquisite monument, a single slab of rose-coloured coral, and on it, in letters formed of pearls, were the words:

"PRINCE HENRY OF ENGLAND."

The tomb had at each of its four corners a kneeling female figure sculptured in mother-of-pearl, while the most graceful, luxuriant sea-plants overhung and surrounded it.

"Oh!" exclaimed Nina, "how very lovely! The Prince could not have had so beautiful a resting-place on earth! If his poor father could only have known about it!"

"And now," said Aquarillo, "you could never guess who is in the next royal tomb, so I will tell you, When the two poor little princes were smothered in the Tower, their bodies were thrown into the river; none of the skeletons afterwards found were really

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theirs, for old Father Thames (a brother of the River-Spirit you saw) carried them tenderly in his arms to the Sea-Nymphs, who have taken great pains with their tomb."

Putting aside a curtain of brilliant sea-weed, Aquarillo showed Nina a most exquisite tomb of delicate frosted silver. The effigies of the little brothers lay as if asleep on a couch; the figures executed in pure white coral, and the drapery in alabaster. The faces, limbs, and golden curls of the children were tinted in natural colours, and it was hard to believe that the sweet little brothers were not alive, and sleeping tranquilly. On the pillow by the young king's head lay the golden crown which had cost him so dear.

The curtain of sea-weed fell back, and Nina exclaimed, "I am so *very* glad to have been here! I shall never forget it. I used always to think it was so dreadful to be buried at sea, but I shall feel very differently now; this is such a beautiful peaceful place, and the graves are never forgotten or neglected, as they might be upon earth."

Quietly they passed out again at the great shining gates, and Nina walked silently on, thinking over all she had seen, when she was roused by a child's cry.

"Oh! what can that be?" asked she, rather startled.

"We are approaching a most important place, the

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great school for juvenile Water-Sprites and Sea-Nymphs, and I rather suspect one of them is in trouble."

They entered a large open space, surrounded by walls of rock, going in by a plain, unpicturesque gateway. Close within the entrance was an elderly lady in a tall mob-cap, holding a struggling sea-boy, to whom she was administering a good old-fashioned whipping, with the good old-fashioned implement, in a very energetic and effective manner.

The victim was roaring loudly, but birch-rod and boy were dropped abruptly, so startled was the old lady when she heard Aquarillo call out:

"Well, Dame Morgana! employed as usual, I see!"

"Lawks-a-daisy-me! What a turn your Royal Highness have given me, to be sure! Who would have thought of your dropping from the clouds, as one might say," exclaimed she with a succession of curtseys. "And there your Royal Highness just caught me with the birch. But, indeed, my life is a regular burden, it is, with these wicked boys, and it serves 'em richly right, so it do, taking away the character of a respectable person like me with their impudent pranks!"

"What does she mean?" inquired Nina of her guide, in a low voice. "How can the children's

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pranks take away her character. They couldn't, really, you know!"

"Begging your ladyship's parding," interrupted the dame, "but that's what they *have* done, as is well beknown to a many mortals, though may be not to your ladyship, through being but young."

"Have you never heard of the 'Fata Morgana,' which so often misleads sailors, Nina?" asked Aquarillo.

"That's it, your ladyship! that's it! and I do assure you I've nothing to do with it, no more than a innocent babe! It's all those idle, bad, young monkeys, though the blame is wrongfully put on me, through having charge of 'em in play-hours, worse luck. If they can get away from me it's just what they enjoy, drawing all manner of deceptive picters—islands, trees, palaces, and such-like—on the mists or clouds; and then it's their fun to see them soft-headed sailors going on and on, trying to get to these places, which naturally they never do, being only those rubbishing boys' tricks. How those sailors can be such great sillies as to be led such dances beats me!

"But what I always have said and always shall say, is, that it's uncommon hard on a poor lone widow woman, like me, to lay the blame at my door—me, that always whips 'em all round, and right well, too, if I only get the chance, till my arm's one large ache!"

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"Ah, dame, you've a great deal to put up with."

"Which your Royal Highness never said a truer word; and at this very moment there's a pain in the small of my back, enough to split it in two, with hunting after those nasty dirty sweeties the children get hold of."

"Sweeties down here?" cried Nina, much interested.

"Surely your ladyship's seen lots of 'em? I turn 'em into stone so that the children can't eat them, it's the only way. Why, now, what you mortals are so fond of picking up, and call cornelian, that's bulls' eyes; amber—that's barley-sugar or toffee; and jet, that's liquorice—nasty messy stuff! But I always take away every bit I can find and throw it on the shore, I do!"

"Have the children been playing any more tricks with the cables?" inquired Aquarillo, with an amused face.

"They make that free with 'em, I do assure you, as you'd think they'd never been taught to respect nothing in all their lives. Not content with making public skipping-ropes of them, they've taken to hiding 'em up with shells and rubbish so that one can't see where it is, and many's the bad fall I've had chasing the little imps. They always lead one over a purpose, and through being excited, as one may say, you get

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tripped up before you know where you are, and I've been down on my face as flat as a flounder, ever so many times!"

Here Nina, observing that Aquarillo was unmistakably smiling, broke into a merry laugh, which so offended Dame Morgana, that she stalked off in dignified silence to her refractory charges.

"Now, Nina," said Aquarillo, "we will visit the Queen-Regent of the ocean, literally the oldest inhabitant. You know her well, both by name and appearance."

"I!" exclaimed Nina. "Oh, I'm sure I don't!"

"Yes, really and truly you do, and once upon a time you used to value her portraits considerably."

"Do tell me what you mean. I don't certainly remember ever having the portrait of any ocean queen. Oh! stop, though!" cried she, as a brilliant idea struck her, "you don't mean Britannia on the pennies, do you?"

"Ah! I thought you would guess rightly before long, because you've plenty of wits when they are not all out wool gathering. Well, you must get into the shell again, and we shall rise to the surface near British shores. There I will show you the fine old crags that surmount her dwelling."

So he put her comfortably among her cushions, where she slept, as usual, until the shell opened, and

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she found herself floating close under a wild, picturesque coast, with steep, dark cliffs and ledges of dangerous-looking rocks running far out to sea.

"Where are we?" asked she.

"You know this place well by name—it is the Land's End, and at the base of these rocks, far under the sea, lie the halls of Britannia's Palace."

"Dear me! how very curious that is!" observed Nina, who felt quite sure that this fact was not mentioned in any of her geography books.

After she had enjoyed the fine prospect for a little, Aquarillo closed the shell, and they at once began sinking quickly.

Then the descent stopped, the shell opened, and she found they were in a cavern, dark, except for a few rays of light which gleamed from a distance, apparently through some chinks in a wall, and the gold and silver team, swimming through the dark water, glanced brightly every now and then, as the light caught their shining scales.

Nina could just see that the low, narrow passage along which they were going suddenly extended, and the rays of light could be plainly seen pouring from the crevices round a great closed door. She gave a quick start when Aquarillo suddenly struck a gong, and the sound boomed and echoed through the dark cavern in a rather unpleasant way.

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Slowly the great door rolled back, and Nina was for a few moments dazzled and confused by the blaze of light and strong fumes of incense which poured through.

At first she was too frightened to look about her, and clung tightly to Aquarillo's arm, but she soon recovered herself, and discovered they were in an immense vaulted hall, entirely of copper—the groined roof, the noble columns, the floor itself, were all of burnished metal.

At the upper end, on a high throne, over which burned an enormous star of electric light, was seated the grand colossal form of the Ocean Queen, Britannia.

She was exactly like her well-known portraits, except that across her knees lay a long straight golden bar. Between every pair of columns in this vast building burnt great braziers, and from these braziers came a strange bluish light, and those powerful fumes of incense which had helped to confuse Nina on her first entrance.

The face of Britannia was wonderfully dignified and calm, but she inclined her head as Aquarillo approached, saying in a deep, but not unmusical voice:

"Welcome, most noble Prince, you do me great honour; but I know you will pardon my not rising in

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your presence, as you are well aware of the storms and disasters that arise if I displace my ruler."

"Aquarillo, what does she mean? Are you really and truly a Prince, and has that great awful-looking lady to obey you—and oh, what *is* her ruler?" whispered Nina, greatly impressed.

"Oh yes; I'm a Prince—you'd have found that out long ago if you had only been wide awake. You will know all about me some day soon. Britannia is the highest of my subjects. And as to the ruler, don't you remember that Britannia rules the waves?"

"But I always thought it meant the other sort of rule, you know," said Nina, doubtfully.

"It means both kinds, and Britannia would always rule the waves very straight and keep them in excellent order, only the Storm-Spirits never leave her alone—they are very restless and tiresome; still, it is better for the health of human beings that there should be high winds occasionally, though many valuable lives are sometimes lost."

Nina listened very attentively to this speech, but she was not feeling at all comfortable, being aware that Britannia's large grave eyes were fixed steadily on her. She therefore tried to hide behind Aquarillo, whispering:

"Oh! I do wish she wouldn't stare so."

"Do not fear me, little maiden," suddenly spoke

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the bell-like voice. "I love all children, and more particularly English ones. Tell me now, what do you think this place is like?"

"I think, your Majesty," said Nina, very respectfully, "that it is like a great cathedral."

"You are right, it is so; and if you examine closely, you will see even more resemblance."

So Nina looked carefully at the walls, and saw that there were hundreds and hundreds of tablets with names engraved on them, exactly like monuments in a cathedral. She turned to Aquarillo, saying:

"This must surely be the place that the Old Man of the Sea meant, when he said that the tombs of fighting people were in another place."

"Yes, here lie the bodies of many a brave sailor, though not by any means all of those whose names you see. Whole crews perish together, and are brought here sometimes. See, in this compartment are the names of all those who perished in the 'Royal George,' though they did not die in battle; their admiral's name is at the top."

And Nina, looking up, saw the name "Kempenfeldt," in great shining letters.

"Are there only the names of English sailors here?"

"Only English names in the central space; but

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there are those of all nations in the two aisles. Britannia is, of course, more especially the patroness of British sailors. You will see the columns nearest her throne bears the name of England's bravest admirals, Nelson's name coming first of all—though neither he nor many others are actually interred here."

Here the Queen's deep voice sounded once more:

"You would like, I am sure, little maid, to see a picture concerning one of the most highly honoured of our tombs."

She beckoned to her to mount the steps of the high throne, and Nina had to screw up every available atom of courage in order to answer the sign. But the great Queen stooped down and gently lifted her on to her knee, where she sat perched on the great golden ruler, and saw Aquarillo watching her from below.

Britannia slowly waved her hand, and the fumes of the brazier nearest to her throne formed themselves into a vivid picture representing a tall, beautiful woman, mounted in a rude chariot, her fair hair falling from under a helmet, and her right arm waving a sword. It was evident that she intended giving a fierce reception to the soldiers who were fast disembarking from a fleet of war-vessels.

"Oh! I know what that is!" exclaimed Nina, quite forgetting her nervousness in the interest of the

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moment, and standing up on the ruler to obtain a better view. "It is poor Queen Boadicea, who fought the Romans so bravely, and poisoned herself because she was conquered at last."

"Yes, her proud spirit could not brook defeat. She desired that her body might be committed to the sea, in order, as she said, that she might rest where a Roman foot could never tread."

The fumes of the incense gradually resumed their natural appearance, and Nina inquired if all the braziers could form pictures?

"Yes, all of them; and some day I hope you will come back and see them, but I know that now your time is limited, and the Prince is waiting."

The Queen kissed Nina, and replaced her on the steps of the throne, Aquarillo leading her at once back to the shell.

She gave one last look back at the vast hall, and the stately form of Britannia, who smiled kindly at her; then the metal door rolled forward, shutting out the brilliant scene, the shell closed, and they were once more speeding rapidly through the water.

Nina slumbered long and soundly, for when Aquarillo roused her, they were floating on the calm surface of a lovely bay, studded with pretty islets, near one of which they were. The water was rippling gently under a bright sun, the air was laden with the

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scent of sweet flowers, and seeing a column of smoke rising from an adjacent mountain, she rightly guessed that they were looking on the far-famed bay of Naples.

"We are going to see the place where Dame Morgana spends her holidays," said Aquarillo, pointing to a little opening in the rock close by them—an opening so small that every wave seemed nearly to fill it up; but the Fairy shell passed safely in, and Nina saw a circular cave filled with the loveliest azure light. It was a light so soft, so strange, that she thought she had never before seen anything so exquisite. Poor, worried Dame Morgana would certainly find it a soothing place of rest. When Nina, at Aquarillo's suggestion, put her hands and arms down into the water, which lay like a liquid sapphire, they looked as if they were carved in the whitest alabaster, and she eagerly inquired the name of this wonderful cave of azure light.

"It is the celebrated grotto in the isle of Capri," said Aquarillo, "and I think you must have read of it before."

Then the shell closed again, and it appeared a very short time before Aquarillo called to her, saying:

"Wake, Nina, the Queen of the Adriatic awaits you!"

The child started hastily up, and saw a sweet-

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looking lady gazing earnestly at her. She was in a gondola of ebony and silver; she wore long robes of black velvet, and a veil of white crape fell almost to her feet, while the strangest part of her attire was a long chain of thick, circular golden links which hung round her neck. Very low and melancholy was her voice as she said:

"Welcome, to what was once beautiful Venice."

Pointing over the water, she directed Nina's gaze to the beautiful city, rising as it were from it; an assemblage of wonderful palaces and churches, which make Venice, even now, a sight never to be forgotten.

"Look at her as she is, and try to realise what she must have been in the days of her magnificence," murmured the veiled Queen. "The waters over which I reign flow through every street, and once they bore gay crowds of the world's best and loveliest on their bosom. Painter, poet, musician, each received a royal welcome here. But the glory had its shadow. Do you see that slender bridge? Ah, how many an awful tale could its stones tell! Over it have passed hundreds of victims, innocent and guilty, to such fearsome dungeons and such ghastly tortures as would make a strong man quake to hear of.

"There was good cause for terror in those days, truly. And, as perhaps you know, when each Doge acquired his dignity, he was bound to perform a

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marriage ceremony with me. Each one of them has thrown down to me a bridal ring, amid the joyous chiming of bells, triumphant music, and gorgeous multitudes gathered to see the sight.

"It did not mean much, but I was young and foolish then, and liked the importance of the ceremony, and my white robes and orange-flowers. See this chain—it is made of my wedding-rings. Alas, I have been long a widow now!"

"But surely you don't regret that all those wicked imprisonments and tortures are over?" said Nina.

"No; it is better as it is; but I am very weary—I shall soon call to the Great Mother to take me!"

So saying, she kissed and waved her hand, as the ebony gondola glided swiftly away.

"Oh dear!" said Nina. "I think this has been a very sad visit."

"You shall have a complete change for the last one, and then we shall be due again at the Fairy cottage."

So Aquarillo sent her off to sleep in her pretty nest, and to her great dismay she awoke to find herself on a sea covered with gigantic icebergs. They towered up on every side in fanciful pinnacles and peaks, and it was under one of the very highest that the Fairy-boat was lying.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Nina, looking very dismal,

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and shivering, "I don't like this place at all. It's horribly cold, and I'm sure this nasty iceberg is going to topple over and squash us."

"For shame, you little coward! I am going to show you something you could never have found out for yourself. You have read about whales, of course?"

"Yes, often; but I don't care about them one bit."

"I suppose you never thought they had a king, did you?"

"I never thought about them at all," answered Nina, rather crossly, for she was much disgusted with her present position. "Nasty, fat, stupid things!"

"Ah! you always were a lazy child, you know. But now, mind, I am going to take you to see the Whale-King."

Nina certainly did not look gratified, but she said nothing, for it had occurred to her that the Whale-King might be within hearing, for anything she knew, and whales were rather too big to offend without due consideration.

Down sank the shell close by the glassy wall of ice, and Aquarillo lifted her out in a dim cave of ice and snow. At the upper end she saw what she at first took for a shiny black mountain, but a nearer view showed it to be an enormous whale lying at full

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length on a bed of snow, and with a gold crown as big as a boat on his head.

Suddenly a great column of water shot up from his nostrils, and poor Nina shook in her shoes, for then began a tremendous noise of flapping and crashing, as his great tail thumped up and down.

"Don't look so frightened, silly girl," said Aquarillo, "he is only wagging his tail to show how pleased he is to see us."

"But I do so wish he wouldn't. It does shake one so dreadfully, you know."

"Come Baleino, old fellow, that is enough; you are terrifying this little maiden, who is not used to welcomes on so large a scale."

Then an extraordinary internal rumbling was heard, which Nina indignantly interpreted as a whalish chuckle, while Aquarillo, going close up to him, inquired cheerily:

"And how have they been using you lately, eh!"

"Ugh! they're always at it, all the summer months, stuffing sods down my breathing-pipe; there's another!"

And again the column of water shot up to the roof, through a little round hole like a chimney.

"What does he do that for? It's very disagreeable!" said Nina.

"*You* would think it disagreeable to have people

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perpetually stopping up your breathing-pipe, by poking sods of grass down it! Overhead is Iceland, and unhappily for the poor Whale-King's comfort, travellers have discovered that if they stuff sods down a certain hole, that they are quickly shot up again in a column of water. Now, this is a great amusement; they don't guess the cause, and so the poor Whale-King has to keep on incessantly clearing his air-hole, as you see."

"Why, that must be the Geysir; I've read about that!"

"Yes, I told you I would show you something you could never have found out for yourself. Now, into your nest again, for the year and a day is over, and we must rejoin the others."

Nina felt extremely glad to get away from the Whale-King, and his chilly abode, and settling herself comfortably in her shell, she never woke again until it stopped, and opened, on the brook in the Fairy garden."

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FOURTH JOURNEY.

CALORICA AND HARRY.

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AT THE COURT OF THE FIRE-KING.

Hor. Oh, day and night, but this is wondrous strange!
Ham. And therefore, as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.—*Hamlet, Act* I.

HARRY'S pretty guide tripped daintily on before him, and when they reached a dense part of the forest, she stopped, and asked Harry if he saw anything particular. He looked carefully about and then replied:

"Well, I don't see anything much, except a queer sort of a large bird's nest, half buried in the ground."

"That's just it! we're to go in that. Come, get in!"

She sprang lightly in and settled herself cosily among the soft moss, and Harry cautiously followed, taking extreme care not to tread on the pretty ruby-coloured dress, for he recollected what usually happened when he trod on ladies' dresses at home.

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Calorica tapped the bottom of the nest with her foot, when, to Harry's great astonishment, it began to sink rapidly through the earth. Down, down, down it went, until only a little round dot of light could be seen above them, and the sides of the shaft through which they descended seemed to be of polished grey granite.

Certainly Harry felt far from comfortable, and he was rendered still less so by the consciousness that Calorica's bright eyes were examining his face with a mischievous twinkle in them, so he kept quite quiet, and only hoped that he looked as if he didn't mind it. This hope, however, was speedily extinguished by Calorica's exclaiming:

"What a terrible fright you're in, to be sure!"

"Well, you see, it *is* rather queer," admitted Harry, "dropping down a hole at no end of a rate like this! It's nearly pitch-dark, too. Would you mind mentioning where we're likely to get to?"

"The centre of the earth," replied Calorica, calmly.

"But I say—oh, come!—it's all red-hot there, isn't it?" asked Harry, quite aghast, and feeling little shivers running up and down his back.

"Yes, except where it's *white* hot," said she, indifferently.

"That's a jolly look-out, certainly!" said Harry,

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waxing rather indignant. "Perhaps that sort of thing may suit you, but how about me?—*I'm* not a salamander, you know."

"Dear, dear, how ignorant you are! Why, we are going to pay our respects at the court of the Fire-King!"

"Well, you see, as I haven't been invited, perhaps he mightn't like it, and I should be awfully sorry to cause any row, so perhaps you wouldn't mind excusing me, as I really haven't the pleasure of knowing him."

"I wouldn't be such a coward—no, *that* I wouldn't," said Calorica, disdainfully. "Don't you know that Queen Titania said you were to be taken care of for a year and a day? It was very troublesome of her, *I* think, but you've very little idea of her discipline, if you suppose I can let you be hurt!"

Notwithstanding this assurance, Harry felt very doubtful; it was perfectly dark now, and they were still descending rapidly. It also occurred to him forcibly that if Queen Titania wanted to amuse him, dropping him down a dark hole, with a prospect of being frizzled at the bottom, was not the plan he should have selected had he been asked.

He also greatly disliked various loud noises and mysterious vibrations, which became plainer every moment, produced apparently by the blows of some gigantic hammer. But he dared not run the risk of

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Calorica's ridicule by asking any questions, so he prudently held his tongue until the nest suddenly stopped, and as it did so, a hundred jets of flame darted from the rocks.

They had reached a small circular cave of black marble, and Harry was relieved to find that there was no apparent increase of temperature. His observant companion evidently guessed what was passing in his mind, for she remarked cheerfully, after blowing a little gold whistle:

"Oh! this isn't the hot place! We're going there directly."

Harry could not help starting when a hitherto invisible door sprang open in the rock, and there entered a cross, grimy old dwarf, no other than Beatrice's amiable friend Carbon. He carried a torch whose brilliance made Harry wink again, for it bore at the top a ball of electric light.

The dwarf knelt at once to Calorica, and was about to speak, when she stopped him, and whispered something in his ear.

Then he turned and looked at Harry, who felt anything but gratified by the inspection, for, judging from his expression, he would have enjoyed annihilating him on the spot. He expostulated in a low growl to Calorica, with a look of intense disgust.

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"What! admit a mortal! and that mortal a *boy*, too, of all things to choose!"

"Now, Carbon, don't be disagreeable; you've got to submit, so the sooner you do it the better. Lead us in!"

"Ugh! come on, then; but it beats me to understand all this, that it does!"

He re-opened the door by which he had entered, pushed back a heavy curtain beyond, and Harry, half-blinded and wholly bewildered, found himself in the Palace of the Fire-King.

It was a hall so vast that the eye could not trace its height or length, with groves of giant columns round whose bases, as well as round the walls, were carved grim and weird devices. And the whole—columns, walls, and floor—were of glowing red-hot metal.

Round the capitals of the pillars were clusters of rich flowers, but each flower was formed of tongues of coloured flame, and over the whole surface in this terrific hall, lights and shadows flickered and chased each other as breaths of air passing over it caused the heat to be more or less intense.

Dusky winged figures crowded the building, some like griffins and other fearful monsters, while others were more fearful yet, for they bore the semblance of human beings.

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Calorica's laughing face was grave; the stupendous grandeur of the scene impressed even her. She touched Harry's arm, and pointed silently to the upper end of the hall. The crowd of gigantic shadowy figures parted, and the tall majestic form of the Fire-King towered in their midst.

His great white wings were opened, and his face was grander, more beautiful, than anything Harry had ever imagined. Wonderful power, dignity, and even sweetness laid their impress on those faultless features. He had seemingly administered a severe rebuke to the crouching forms at the foot of his throne, for his right arm was raised, and his whole attitude spoke of indomitable authority. Above him blazed a star of gigantic diamonds, whose living rays flashed with unearthly beauty, and the throne itself was of carbuncles, glowing with more than natural lustre.

It was a scene of appalling splendour, even the winged forms were silent and motionless before their majestic King, their heads bowed in unquestioning submission.

Then the monarch, for the first time, caught sight of Calorica. He dismissed the crowd with a wave of his arm, and, spreading their great wings, they floated to distant parts of the vast hall, disappearing behind the glowing pillars.

Lightly the dread King sprang from his throne,

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and it was with a smile of indescribable tenderness that he greeted Calorica, who would have knelt before him, but he prevented her, led her up to the carbuncle throne, and placed her by himself. She soon recovered her natural manner, and the King listened with a smile to her introduction of Harry, who had been left standing with old Carbon.

"He is in such a terrible fright," added Calorica, laughing.

"At that I suppose one may scarcely wonder," replied the King, kindly, and then whispered, "though I cannot picture fear existing in thy presence, my Princess!"

He had bent his stately head, and continued speaking in a low tone, while Harry, in obedience to a sign from him, seated himself on the lowest step of the throne.

He sincerely hoped that Calorica did not notice a slight hesitation before he did so, but the steps were glowing at a white heat, and it certainly did require no little resolution to sit down. But he heard a sort of derisive chuckle proceed from old Carbon, who stood watching him, so down he boldly went, and strange to say, was quite comfortable.

In fact, though everything in this marvellous Palace was of fire, it had caused him no unpleasant sensation of heat, and he therefore soon began to feel

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more at ease; and another fact had time to attract his attention—namely, that the Fire-King and Calorica were unmistakably lovers, and that as regarded this too-fascinating young lady, he—Harry—was absolutely nowhere. Addressing Carbon, for want of any other confidant, he observed in a tone of the deepest disgust:

"It's a jolly shame! that it is! She lets a fellow get awfully spoony on her, and then coolly throws him over for another fellow like—like—like anything!"

"Well, you're a nice sort of boy, you are, to go and fall in love with a Princess! It's like your cheek to do it!"

"Just you shut up! I'm not going to stand any of *your* nonsense, you know. *He's* bad enough!" replied the injured Harry, indicating the King disrespectfully by a jerk of his head.

"Hoity-toity! Well I'm sure! The Princess has turned your head, my fine fellow. But she'll be wiser soon, for the wedding's to come off almost directly—not that that's any business of your's, though," added old Carbon in a growl.

"If you don't look out, you'll find yourself kicked into the middle of next week, and your ugly old head jolly well punched in about half a minute!" was the exasperated youth's retort.

The old dwarf regarded him with a look of unspeakable indignation, muttering to himself:

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"It's no use, I can't do it! I know I shouldn't be able to keep my hands off him long—a young brute!"

He then ascended the steps of the throne, and prostrating himself at the King's feet, appeared to plead for some favour very earnestly, for at last Calorica said impatiently:

"Let him go, Sire! since he is so disobliging; but he must certainly show the diamond factory first, no one else can do that as well!"

"You hear the Princess," said the King. "Obey at once, and let me hear no farther complaints of incivility. If you behave properly your request is granted, and we exempt you from any subsequent attendance on our youthful guest."

Carbon descended the steps with a most miserable expression, but he felt there was no escape, so he growled:

"I've got to show you the diamond factory. Come along! and then I'm off, for, thank goodness, I shall have got rid of you!"

"But is not the Princess coming too?" asked Harry anxiously.

"Not she, indeed! She's got something much pleasanter to do! Only to think of your expecting our future Queen to go trotting about after you! Why, I consider it's beneath *me* to do it, I can tell you!"

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"Just you remember what the King said as to being civil, old boy, will you?" suggested Harry, confidentially.

So Carbon prudently held his tongue, and they re-entered the black marble cave, where the vibrations and loud thumps were again very apparent. But Harry was used to anything by this time, and followed Carbon into the nest, which sank with them, and presently passed into a dense cloud of steam, while the boy, besides being unable to see anything, was almost deafened by the whirr of machinery, murmur of many voices, and a tremendous rushing of water, close to him.

They reached the floor, and Harry's eyes becoming more accustomed to the dim light, he made out that they were in an immense cavern, at one end of which the gigantic hammer, the sound of whose blows had so disturbed his nerves, worked ceaselessly up and down, pounding some white paste in a great cistern or tank. Round the sides of the cavern glowed enormous furnaces, and crowds of dwarfs, more or less like Carbon, were busily working everywhere. Harry watched them with much interest, and at last inquired:

"Who are all these queer-looking fellows?"

"They are the Mineral-Gnomes, the most powerful and industrious race of Fairy beings; and I am their Chief!" added Carbon, proudly.

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AT THE COURT OF THE FIRE-KING. (*p.* 216.)

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"Well, you're quite right to mention it, because nobody would ever have thought it," replied Harry, who felt that he "owed one" to his surly guide. "But where are the diamonds?" added he, suddenly recollecting the object of their visit.

"Now, anything except a boy would have inquired for the beginning instead of the end," answered the Gnome-Chief; "but I'm going to show you everything in proper order, whether you like it or not."

He led the boy to where the steam made a dense mass, but waving his torch, he dispersed it enough for Harry to see a wonderful sight. At their feet lay a lake of boiling water, covered with soap-suds, and on platforms round the banks were hundreds of busy Gnomes, scrubbing away at pieces of shining black stuff, and rinsing them carefully afterwards. Harry stooped to examine more closely, and then exclaimed:

"What *can* they be doing? They're surely not washing coals!"

"And you didn't even know that diamonds are purified coals!" sighed Carbon. "There's a lamentable state of ignorance for you!"

"But how do you get them to look bright and transparent?" asked Harry, too much interested to resent the last speech.

"Wash 'em white first, pound 'em up under the

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steam hammer, and bake 'em—any size—in the furnaces afterwards," explained Carbon with brevity.

"And where does all the water come from?"

"There!" replied the Gnome; and clearing away the steam a little more, he showed Harry a great column of water which was descending from the vaulted roof in an unbroken stream. Then Carbon observed:

"That's from the sea; did you ever hear of the Maelstrom?"

"Yes, rather!" replied Harry, staring in blank astonishment.

"Oh! you have, have you! Well, and now you know what causes it; most people don't."

"Bless me! How jolly queer! and what becomes of all the steam?" inquired Harry.

"Fogs," replied Carbon, concisely.

"Then you actually mean that when it's a fog up on earth, it's you fellows letting off the steam," said Harry.

The Gnome nodded, and they passed on by the ever-thundering hammer kneading up the white paste, and then to the row of giant furnaces from which the busy Gnomes were clearing away tons of glowing cinders, while others were carefully carrying trays containing red-hot lumps in various forms, which Harry concluded would be diamonds when they were

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cold. It then occurred to him to ask Carbon what became of the heaps of cinders.

"We wait till they get too many, and then pitch 'em up through any mountain that's got a hole in it handy."

"But oh, I say, you don't mean that's what we call eruptions, do you?" gasped Harry, perfectly taken aback.

Carbon again nodded, and Harry meditated in silence on the entirely new view he should have to take for the future of various natural phenomena. An idea suddenly struck him, and he inquired:

"Well, now, and what makes earthquakes?"

"Several things. Sometimes the big hammer wants oiling and works roughly, that shakes up you mortals pretty considerably, and sometimes it's the Gnomes stamping down the bits of precious stones and metal you're all so greedy after. We hide 'em up in all sorts of chinks and crevices, and pound 'em well in. You'll observe (that is if you ever *do* observe anything) that there's mostly lots of earthquakes where precious minerals are found. And now," said he, with an air of extreme relief, "here's the last place—the diamond-stores."

He unlocked a small iron door, and Harry beheld a very extensive cave, with shelves running all round it, and on every shelf lay heaps of diamonds, flashing

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and sparkling in the light of Carbon's torch in dazzling array.

The boy gazed at them in speechless admiration, and then the Gnome pointed to a heap of dusty, tiny bits in a corner.

"These are going to be stowed away for you human beings; you'll be years grubbing away at 'em. And now I've done with you!"

Before Harry could say a word he found himself standing again in the Hall of Fire. Carbon pointed silently to the King and Calorica, and vanished without another syllable.

The young couple were talking, regardless of time and circumstance, as any pair of human lovers might have been, and it was some minutes before Calorica noticed poor, disconsolate Harry, fidgeting away on one leg, and gazing up at her reproachfully, then with a start and blush, she exclaimed:

"Oh! I'm so sorry! I quite forgot you. I hope you enjoyed going over the diamond factory, and how did old Carbon treat you, after all?"

"We got on capitally, thank you, and I was awfully interested in it all, though I don't know what I'm to do next," hinted Harry.

"Ah! we will provide you with another and a younger guide," said the King considerately. "Fiammo! Come here!"

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Much to Harry's relief, it was a boy of apparently his own age that replied to the summons. He wore a kilt and scarf of scarlet silk, and except for the strange attire, would have looked like a human boy, save that here and there little jets of flame shone out at the ends of his curly hair, which gave him an appearance at once comical and unearthly.

"Fiammo," said the King, "we desire that you show this young guest of ours whatever is likely to interest and amuse him within the precincts of the Palace, except the diamond factory, over which Carbon has already conducted him."

At the mention of Carbon's name, Fiammo darted an odd, sly glance of inquiry backwards over his shoulder at Harry, and the latter fully understood from that moment that there was sympathy between them in their opinion of that estimable old Gnome.

"Oh, I say! it's such a jolly change to have you for a guide instead of that old bear!" said Harry, confidentially to his new friend; "how he does try to sit upon a fellow, to be sure."

"Doesn't he—just!" responded Fiammo; "he's a horrid old sneak! He must have been awfully afraid of the Princess, or he'd never have gone anywhere with you. He hates boys like poison."

"Old brute!" said Harry, emphatically.

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"And now—there's lots of things to amuse you—I daresay you would like to see the gold-making first?"

Harry eagerly assenting, the two boys started off together, leaving the great hall by a small staircase close by the door of the black cavern, and entered an apparently endless gallery, filled with hundreds of looms. Working at these, with motions so rapid that it was difficult to follow them, were countless female Gnomes, the first that Harry had seen. Their complexions were very dark, but most of them were handsome, and the form of their slender arms and hands peculiarly graceful.

Down through the roof poured innumerable golden threads, looking like a perpetual shower of golden rain, and from these threads, which were collected and passed into the looms, the busy Gnomes were weaving all kinds of things. Some were making bars of gold by twisting an immense number of threads into great coils, which were duly pressed into shape by suitable machines; others were weaving cloth of gold, and from another set of machines the precious metal was pouring out from between heavy rollers, in smooth shining sheets like cardboard.

Harry no longer wondered at the vibrations and whirring which he had heard from the nest, and after watching for some time, he exclaimed admiringly:

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"It's most wonderful! Where do all the gold threads come from?"

"They are prepared sunbeams. First of all our Gnomes have to gather the rays in the upper air, and bring them down here, where they are condensed by a powerful apparatus, and then they come down all ready for the women to use them, as you see."

"What a tremendously clever, industrious set you Gnomes are, to be sure!"

"I'm not a Gnome, I'm a Fire-Spirit," replied Fiammo; "but you are quite right in admiring the Gnomes—you see not even the women are idle. And we Fire-Spirits have to work just as hard; many of us are told off to spread gold about for you mortals to dig out or pick up as the case may be—for we are bound to give you a certain supply, though, of course, our people and Queen Titania's get all the best of everything."

"Now I call that awfully selfish," said Harry, indignantly.

"I can't say I see it; for it's we who have the trouble of collecting and preparing all the minerals. Why, every atom of silver you use has to be brought all the way down from the moon by our people, and precious hard work it is, I can tell you!"

"From the *moon!*" exclaimed Harry, in extreme

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amazement; "why, how do they manage to find any *there?*"

"Why, the moon's made of silver—you don't mean to say you never were told that?" said Fiammo, in a tone of contempt. "Why, where *could* you have been to school, eh?"

"Eton," replied Harry, faintly.

"Then what a precious set of muffs they must be there!" said Fiammo.

Harry's hair nearly stood on end at the reckless audacity of this speech, and muttering something about "Perhaps the Head knew about all these things, but he was pretty sure none of the other fellows did!" he made a private resolution not to express any more astonishment, or ask any more dangerous questions, whatever might befall him.

"Come along; I'm going to show you the jewel warehouses."

Unlocking a small side door, Fiammo led his friend into a circular chamber of snowy marble, and surrounded by great vases of alabaster, each brimfull of splendid gems of every kind and colour. Harry forgot his prudence in admiration, calling out:

"Oh, this is no end of a jolly place! Why, some of these stones must weigh pounds and pounds!—where do you contrive to get them?"

Fiammo told him all that Beatrice's Dream-Fairy

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had explained to her about these gem-stars, and Harry actually had to sit down, he was so overcome with astonishment and awe.

"How frightfully rich you fellows must be!" said he at last.

"Yes, our wealth is endless—but then, as you see, our work is endless, too. I think we earn it fairly enough."

"Only I should hate to live in this fiery place, underground," remarked Harry, thoughtfully.

"Oh, we don't mind about that a bit! Besides, we've all of us lots to do above ground; we work in the upper air, and all over the earth; why, you'd never enjoy a cheerful fireside, except for us!"

"Then you have to do with all sorts of fires?"

"Certainly, good and bad, for some of our bad Spirits are very malicious, and do an awful lot of harm, and then doesn't the King pitch into them, that's all! A whole batch of culprits were condemned to imprisonment to-day; very severely punished they will be, too!"

"Oh!" said Harry. "I suppose they were those awful-looking winged creatures, no end of a size, round the King's throne; they looked as if they'd just had a tremendous wigging, I remember!"

"Yes, those big fellows are always dangerous. Now the smaller Fire-Spirits, like me, are perfectly harm-

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less. I never hurt a human being in my life! Well, let me see; I can't think of anything else to amuse you—stop, though, there's the gold and silver fish—you'd like to see how they are made?"

"Very much indeed," said Harry.

So Fiammo led him along many corridors, where hundreds of busy Gnomes were hurrying to and fro on their numberless errands. At length they reached a large open space, one end of which was shut off with a great glass screen reaching from floor to roof, and the space behind filled with water, like an immense aquarium. It was lighted, like all the rest of this subterranean world, by jets of flame coming from the roof and walls.

Inside the aquarium were some very queer fish indeed—neither more nor less than a number of hard, stern-looking old people of both sexes, anxiously employed in weighing out money. Harry particularly noticed the very unprepossessing old gentleman nearest him. He kept incessantly taking gold and silver coins from a bag lying by him, and as incessantly, while he weighed them, they changed into gold and silver fish, and swam up and away through the water. The same thing happened to all the other old people.

"Well!" remarked Harry, "what a mad set they are to live in an aquarium, and go on weighing their

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gold and silver, only to see it swim away! What do they do it for?"

"It is the punishment commanded by the Great Mother for avarice. Not one of these people ever gave away a penny in charity in their lives, so they are condemned to occupy themselves for a thousand years in what was their favourite occupation on earth, weighing their beloved coins, and to see them evade their grasp, by swimming away as fishes. But the money does good, for the gold and silver fish are pretty little things, and please people very much, besides being useful to the Water-Nymphs."

"Have you been well amused?" suddenly inquired the King's deep, musical voice, close behind them.

Both boys started, and turning round, beheld the King and Calorica watching them.

"I have enjoyed myself extremely, and I thank your Majesty for a most pleasant evening," answered Harry, adapting with prompt politeness a well-known formula to present circumstances.

"Evening!" whispered Fiammo. "Why, you've been months of your mortal time down here!"

"Come, Harry, we must go now! I have other places to show you," said Calorica.

"And our next meeting?"—murmured the King, bending over her, and finishing the sentence in an inaudible whisper.

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"Will be their wedding," again suggested Fiammo in Harry's ear. "They are to be married almost directly, and it's to be an awfully swell affair, for they expect the Prince-Royal's marriage to take place at the same time, and possibly that of a younger brother also."

"Oh, she's going! I wish you would come too!" said Harry in a low voice to his young friend, for he felt that confidence in Calorica was misplaced. He did not expect to be overheard, but he was, for the King, after a smiling consultation with the Princess, said:

"Go then, Fiammo, and give your future Queen all the aid you can!"

So the boys ran joyfully off to the cavern, where the nest was awaiting them, but their patience was sorely tried, for it was a weary while before the royal lovers joined them.

Then the King put Calorica carefully in, the boys scrambled up, and the nest ascended rapidly to the surface of the earth again.

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THE WORK OF THE FIRE-SPIRITS.

"Oh, happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare,
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I bless'd them unaware!"—*Coleridge.*

UP mounted the nest, and they reached the surface of the earth in due time, but it was certainly not at the same spot from which they had descended. Summer and forest scenery had alike disappeared, and they stood upon a snowy hill-side, looking down upon a village church, whose ivy-covered tower was most picturesque in its snowy wreaths. Harry felt very thankful that he had Fiammo to talk to, for Calorica was absent and uncommunicative.

"What do you think she's brought us here for?" inquired he, with his hands in his pockets, and stamping his feet, from an idea that they must be cold—though in reality while in Calorica's charge he felt neither extreme of heat or cold.

"I think it's Christmas Eve, and the good Fire-

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Spirits are all busy enough then—that's sure to be why," said Fiammo.

The Princess vouchsafed no information, but she signed to them to follow her, and they went down to the large, comfortable rectory, and royal though she was she entered by the back-door, and led them into the old-fashioned, roomy kitchen; she lightly touched Harry's ears and eyelids, and he became conscious of the presence of hundreds of busy sprites, all dressed like Fiammo, in ruby-coloured silk.

They clustered in and about the fire like so many bees, helping energetically in the great preparations going on for the morrow's feast. Some were battling with refractory pieces of coal which objected to burning properly, others were fanning the cakes in the oven, lest they should be blackened, while crowds of others were busy helping the servants in various ways. They seemed such jovial, lively little fellows that Harry's heart warmed towards them directly. Fiammo and he went through the house and found many children running up and down in a state of great excitement, while their elders moved about, equally busy but more sedate. Everyone had a happy face, and the active Fire-Spirits found constant work in keeping up roaring fires everywhere. Sometimes the little beings fairly clapped their hands in their enjoyment of some joke among themselves, and then the children cried:

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"Hark, how the fire is crackling!"

Harry enjoyed all this so much that he felt very unwilling to go, but he saw Calorica beckoning, and therefore followed her into a cottage some distance down the village. Here the little Fire-Spirits had far harder work to do, but it only seemed to make them the merrier, for the coals here being neither plentiful nor good, they required very strong measures to induce them to burn up well enough for cooking purposes.

One small child had just come in, sadly cold, out of the snow, but everybody was much too busy to notice her, so she sat herself down in a corner to cry quietly over her aching toes and fingers. But no sooner did the quick little Fire-Spirits see this than quite a crowd of them gathered round her, helping her off with her wet boots, and then set to work briskly rubbing the little blue feet and hands. So, in a wonderfully short time they were warm and comfortable, the tears dried on the rosy cheeks, and the round blue eyes devoted themselves solely to watching admiringly the preparations for to-morrow's pudding.

Harry thought of the quaint old lines, as he looked at her:

"Said a smile to a tear
On the cheek of my dear,
How come we both here together?"

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It certainly appeared a pleasant prospect for the Christmas dinner, for the rector's wife had sent materials for a pudding of startling dimensions, and the rector himself had contributed a goodly piece of beef—these gifts causing many merry faces and glad voices.

Harry exclaimed, after a long inspection of the happy group:

"Oh, how I wish I could make them some present. Money would be best, for they don't look as if they'd too much!"

"You shall do so, certainly," answered Calorica, and bidding him take off his cap, she tapped it five times, each tap leaving in it a bright new gold sovereign.

"Oh, what a jolly fellow—Princess I mean—you are! Thanks so much! Only how are we to give it without puzzling them?"

"I know," said Fiammo; "we'll put the money in a canvas bag, address it properly, knock at the door, and then leave it on the door-step."

This idea was greatly applauded, the little Fire-Spirits quite jumped for joy, and one of them soon finding a bag, the plan was duly carried out. Fiammo knocked loudly at the door, which the mother opened, and, of course, saw nobody, but on Calorica's touching her forehead, she looked down, and beheld a neat

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little canvas bag lying at her feet. Taking it up, she saw a paper pinned to it, on which was written, "For John Gray, a Christmas present from a friend." She called out directly:

"Father, father, come here! Here's a bag just been left on the door-step for you, and a whole five pounds in it—only look!"

Then the entire family assembled, and many were the exclamations of delight and surprise, and wild were the guesses, as to who could have bestowed so munificent a gift. At length it was suggested that it must be Uncle Tony, who was well known to be rich, but very eccentric, and who never did anything like anybody else.

"Yes, wife," said John Gray, "depend on it, it's him—not a doubt of it! But we shall never get him to own to it."

And Harry considered that Uncle Tony would be a sadly unprincipled old person if he ever did "own to it."

Night was now fast closing in, and Calorica led the boys away through the great old porch into the village church. All was very quiet and still, but as they walked down the centre Harry saw the glow of an iron stove, near which were a number of loaves of bread. It was a pretty sight, for the Fire-Spirits were very busy in the stove making it throw a warm light

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far over the grey old pillars, now wreathed with holly and evergreens, and even the old-fashioned oak pews had their bright garlands to adorn them, and a little robin seemed to have forgotten the lateness of the hour, and was very wide awake indeed, picking up stray crumbs on the floor.

"It's a curious thing to keep loaves of bread in a church, isn't it?" observed Harry at last.

"It is the annual Christmas dole of bread for poor widows. These loaves will be given away early in the morning," replied Calorica.

She took Harry round the church and showed him the sculptured monuments and fine old brasses which adorned the building, and some with long inscriptions setting forth the many virtues of the quiet dead who lay beneath. Many of the Fire-Spirits were engaged in dusting and polishing them, but by far the tenderest care they devoted to a little plain granite slab in the floor of one of the aisles. They were most carefully rubbing and cleaning it, and managed that a warm ray of light from the great stove should always fall on it, so that Harry could plainly read the one simple name that was carved on it:

"RUTH."

"What makes them take such particular care of that grave?" asked he, after observing their labours for some time.

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"Because it is so loved and cared for by a human being," replied Calorica. "It is that of a sweet and fair young village girl, who died on Christmas morning fifty years ago," and the Princess bent reverently over the stone.

"That is a very long while ago," said Harry. "Why, she'd be quite an old woman now!"

"Nearly seventy years of age! but her memory is fresh and green in one faithful heart, and to him she is always young and fair. So the Fire-Spirits take especial pains with the grave, for they don't feel much interest in forgotten tombs, and most of these grand ones receive very little attention on that account."

"Who is it that still loves and thinks of Ruth so much?" asked Harry, who felt much interested in her already.

"Her husband; they had been married just one month when she died."

"Then, surely, it must have been very sudden?"

"Yes, it was from an accident. She left home that Christmas morning to visit a sick and lonely old friend, and to reach the cottage had to cross a little wooden bridge over a mill-stream. It is supposed that her foot must have slipped on the icy plank, but no one knows precisely how it happened. She never returned; the unfortunate husband missing her at church, went to inquire about her delay, and found

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the railing of the bridge all broken away, and soon after he saw her body lying under the cruel water."

"Oh! what a fearful shock!" exclaimed Harry. "I wonder it did not drive him right out of his mind!"

"The dark shadow of that grief has never passed away from his life; it has lasted all these years as unwavering as his love."

There was a sudden noise of feet and voices; several men entered the church, and walked up to the stove, warming and rubbing their hands.

The great clock in the tower struck midnight, the men hastened away, and presently the bells rang out their glad Christmas greeting, far and near, and so merrily they sounded, that they might never have known what it was to wail out the mournful notes of a knell.

After a while the bells ceased, and the ringers left the church, and when they were all gone there came forth an old, old man—the sexton, evidently. He put fresh coals upon the fire, while the busy little spirits exerted themselves manfully, and a ruddy blaze sprang up, and threw a long warm beam of light straight over Ruth's grave.

For the old sexton went there and knelt down to kiss the letters that formed her name. Then he clasped his trembling hands, and raising his eyes, now full of tears, he murmured:

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"It cannot be much longer—oh, my sweet wife! —my own pretty, loving little Ruth! Fifty years—fifty years ago this morning! Ah, let it be on Christmas Day that you come for me, my darling!"

Harry's eyes felt very queer, he looked at Calorica —but she was kneeling by the old man's side, her face hidden in her hands; Fiammo had his against a pillar, so Harry could hold out no longer, and privately indulged in a good cry.

He must have cried himself to sleep, too, for when he opened his eyes the morning light was streaming through the stained-glass windows, pouring a flood of rich colour on Ruth's name. The old man was gone, only Calorica and Fiammo remained. She took his hand and led him into a room in the rectory where a large party was assembled for breakfast. The rector presently entered with a grave, sad face.

"What has kept you so long, papa?" asked one.

"My children, it grieves me much that the first news for you this happy morning should be sad instead of joyous. Your old friend and favourite, Morgan, died early this morning."

"Morgan the sexton!" exclaimed his wife; "he was perfectly well late last night, for he came here to speak to me."

"His sister came half an hour ago to tell me of his death; it is she who has detained me. Her

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account is that, being surprised that he did not come down at his usual hour, she went up to his room, fearing he might be ill. As she opened the door, he raised himself in his bed, a beautiful smile overspread his face, and stretching out his arms, he cried:

"'Oh, my dear love! I am coming, I am coming!' and then fell back and died, with the smile of happiness still on his face; and his sister tells me that he always said his Ruth would come for him some Christmas morning."

"Poor Morgan!" softly spoke the rector's wife; "what a faithful love his has been! It is best as it is. This will, indeed, be a glorious Christmas Day for him."

Then the many happy duties of the day went on as usual, and though the elders were perhaps a degree graver and more silent than usual, the young ones were soon as merry as ever, preparing for the visitors that were coming.

The Fire-Spirits were helping everywhere where light and warmth were needed, and when night at length came on, they climbed into all the lamps and candles to make them burn more brightly. A gay young party was assembled, and there was a large Christmas-tree, in which the Fire-Spirits absolutely revelled, and some of them got over-excited, and made the tapers burn up so high that they set fire to

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the branches, which was a little unpleasant; however, there were plenty of people to blow the flames out, so it was not of much consequence. By-and-by, the young folks began dancing, and as the little Fire-Spirits are passionately fond of music, they whirled about in great delight.

One small fellow crept into the wide mouth of a wind instrument to find out how the sound was made, but as this naturally stopped the music, the unfortunate performer could not make out what was the matter; so Fiammo dragged the culprit out by the heels, and gave him a good shaking, to correct his curiosity. Then the music went merrily on again, and it was very late before the last little Fire-Spirit was reluctantly blown off his candle, and the room left to darkness and solitude.

For, as Fiammo explained to Harry, no candle can be put out as long as a Fire-Spirit is there, but if you blow him off, or dislodge him with an extinguisher, the flame dies out directly.

As this explanation ended, the boy felt his eyes grow very heavy, and though he was dimly conscious of being raised and carried through the air, he never woke until Calorica touched his shoulder. They were all three standing in the street of some town, and smoke and flames were issuing from a house opposite.

With a tremendous crashing and dashing several

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bright-red fire engines dashed up, their horses at full gallop, and men clinging round wherever it was possible to do so.

Very soon their bright helmets might be seen almost *in* the flames, for these men of the Fire Brigade unite great courage with experience, and wherever it could be done, they poured streams of water on the blazing house. Ladders were placed against the windows, and inmate after inmate was safely lowered to the street. Suddenly a loud cry was heard, for the youngest child was found to be missing, and despite all efforts to prevent him, the father dashed back into the flames.

Calorica grew pale, and Fiammo exclaimed instantly:

"Come on, Harry! fire cannot hurt you now—help me to save that plucky fellow! Follow me!"

Both boys rushed into the house, and Fiammo held his arms over the brave father, Harry doing the same, so that he was completely protected, and he got out of the fierce heat holding his child safe and unhurt in his arms. A long, deep shout of thankfulness from the watching multitude greeted his appearance, for no one expected to see him alive again, and his escape was looked upon as something almost miraculous, even by the hardy members of the Fire Brigade.

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"Ah!" said Fiammo, with a sigh of relief, as Calorica warmly praised them, "that was sharp work. We had to be pretty brisk, certainly. It's those brutes of big Fire-Fiends that have been doing this—did you not see them hiding as we passed through?"

Harry thought, and remembered that he had fancied he saw dark, shadowy forms amidst the smoke, but he added honestly:

"To tell the truth, I was in such a dreadful funk that I did not notice anything much. But why should those great fellows hide from you? What cowards they must be!"

"Oh! they saw the Princess, and knew I should tell her, if I recognised any of them, the sneaks! but I'll tell the King, as sure as I'm here, and they won't be able to humbug him, *I* know!" answered Fiammo.

"Were none of those jolly little Fire-Spirits there?"

"No, those big fellows always frighten the poor little beggars away; but they never bully me, they're too wise to try it on, because they know I'm often near the King!"

"You're really not half a bad boy," said Calorica encouragingly. "I shall decidedly mention you favourably to the King, and I rather think I shall have you for my own page."

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Fiammo looked very much gratified, and knelt to kiss her hand in the most delighted manner. The Princess then blew a little gold whistle, and, to Harry's extreme surprise, down flew a great white owl, which she immediately mounted, while the boy's eyes opened to their widest.

"This is my steed," said Calorica, "and it is a very useful one, I can tell you. She carried you here in your sleep, though you stare so unbelievingly! Come, get up, and try how you like it awake. Come, also, Fiammo, there will be plenty of room on her tail!"

This was evidently a great honour, for the future page looked much elated as he took up the position indicated. The great bird rose from the ground, and sailed steadily along, while Harry, though he scarcely dared to open his eyes, tried his best to feel at his ease. Calorica observed suddenly:

"Two of your sisters have been flying about all over the world on owls, and enjoying it immensely. Don't you?"

"I'm sure I'm delighted to hear it," replied Harry, skilfully evading the Princess's question.

"Oh, yes; both Violet and Beatrice are quite delighted with this mode of travelling. You don't mean to say you don't like it?" asked she, maliciously.

"Well—no, not altogether," owned Harry, reluctantly. "You see a fellow *must* have a little time

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to get used to all these awfully queer situations. It's impossible for any fellow to like them all at once, you know. And then—it certainly *is* slippery," added he, with a spasmodic clutch at the bird's feathers.

For the fact was, being obliged to sit low down on the owl's back, he was by no means so comfortably situated as his sisters and Calorica, who occupied the soft, safe place between the wings. Fiammo, however, perched himself jauntily on the bird's tail, and appeared perfectly contented and comfortable. Had he been a human boy and the Princess absent, he would infallibly have put his hands in his pockets and whistled.

"Now, Fiammo," said Calorica, "royal pages ought to be useful, entertaining boys. Tell us something about your adventures, something very interesting."

"I'm afraid I shan't be a good hand at it, your Royal Highness, we've never any practice in talking, there's so little time for it; and, besides, if we *do* try to get up a quiet chat, old Carbon is always down upon us like a shot."

"Never mind about old Carbon, but do as I tell you!" said the Princess, in a very decided tone.

"Well, then; once I was over in America, right out in the wilds, where very few people had ever been in those days. Carbon and a lot of us were taking

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some silver to the mountains there, and a rather amusing adventure I had, certainly.

"There was a very nice fellow, a human being I mean, a Scotchman, who had bought a tract of land, and settled himself down in those lonely back-woods. He had built a comfortable house and good farm-buildings, all as nice as possible, when those rascally sneaks—the Indians—attacked his place one dark night; all his people bolted, and the rascals set fire to his buildings and stacks. I could see those big Fire-Fiends helping them, too.

"Well, my Scotch friend made a gallant fight for his life, but he was only one against a hundred, so they got him down, and were just going to scalp him, when a lucky idea suddenly struck me. I uttered a terrific war-whoop in the forest close by; the chief rushed off with a torch to see what could be the matter; and, my eyes! wasn't he scared! I laugh when I think of it now! I appeared as a hob-goblin of awful form, with great glaring saucer-eyes, and I told him that if the man were killed, or even hurt, that he and his tribe should be destroyed in the most dreadful manner. In his terror I made him swear not only to save the captive, but also that he would never attack a white man again all his life. He rushed back as fast as his legs would carry him, and if he didn't begin tomahawking his own men right

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and left, for fear they should damage the Scotchman!

"They all thought he had gone suddenly mad, but when he gave a description of me (it wasn't flattering, I can tell you) and repeated my threats, they took to their heels in real good style, and not one of that tribe ever ventured to attack a white man afterwards!

"My plucky friend soon recovered his knocking about, and I seized an opportunity, when old Carbon's back was turned, of boning a lot of rough silver, which I laid in a heap in the garden where I knew he would find it. He always believed it was an unaccountable act of reparation on the part of the Indians. It more than repaid the damage, and he's a wealthy man, and a grandfather now."

"A *grandfather!*" exclaimed Harry; "why, how old are you?"

"Just turned a hundred and fifty," replied Fiammo.

"Good gracious—what an age! Why, I thought you were quite a boy, you know."

"Well, so I am—at least I'm quite a young fellow. Why, there's old Carbon, now, he must be at least two thousand if he's a day."

Harry nearly slipped off the owl in the extremity of his astonishment, but hastily recovering himself and his balance, he observed:

"Well, that's the very queerest thing I've heard

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yet, and I've been hearing some tolerably queer things lately, too."

"Fiammo, you have done very well so far," said Calorica; "go on, and tell us something more."

"I'm very much afraid, your Royal Highness, that I've nothing more to tell. Now, Carbon, if he chose, could tell you all sorts of wonderful stories about the old Fire-Worshippers in Persia, such grand old fellows they must have been; we have never been so well treated since. Then there were the Vestals—" Here Fiammo paused, and looked at the Princess, but seeing that her thoughts were evidently far away, and that she certainly was not listening, he spoke in a lower tone to Harry, "I always heard, you know, that our King was spoony on one of those Vestals, they were awfully pretty girls! Then some of the old magicians found out a way of taking our Spirits captive, and chaining them to lamps, and then put them in tombs to burn in solitude for hundreds of years, until the poor little things could find someone to set them free, for of course our King never permitted such cruelty if he knew of it."

"I say," said Harry, in the same low tone, "will the Princess have to live in that dreadful red-hot place always when she is married?"

"Bless your innocence! Why, that was only the Audience Chamber! That part of the Palace where

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the Princess will live is more beautiful than anything you can conceive! The rooms are of rock-crystal, decorated with gold, silver, and precious stones. Besides, the King has several Palaces up on earth; the Princess will be able to live just where she likes."

"I'm glad to hear it," replied Harry, who could not at all get over his prejudice against subterranean abodes, however splendid they might be.

"Fiammo!" suddenly called the Princess, making both the boys start, "I have been thinking about those prisoners that the King had just condemned as we entered the Hall of Fire. What had they done? I never saw His Majesty so indignant before."

"They were the Fire-Fiends who had helped in the burning of poor, beautiful Paris! They assisted human fiends, as reckless as themselves, in the work of destruction; so, fearing the King's vengeance, they tried to hide themselves anywhere, but he has found them all now, though the Storm-Spirits did their best to conceal them, because it is these Fire-Fiends who supply the lightning darts with which to fight our Gnomes. But they are safely caught now, and no mistake!"

"What is their punishment to be?" inquired Harry.

"The most terrible known to us: they are to be skewered on to the North Pole, one on top of the

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other, just like larks, you know, for a thousand years!"

"Dear me!" ejaculated Harry, "won't it kill them right off?"

"No, for they can't be killed, but it isn't a pleasant sensation. That's what the North and South Poles are for; everything's useful, if one only knew it! Milder offenders are punished by being shut up inside icebergs. Being Fire-Spirits, they naturally feel the cold a good deal; and when you hear of great pieces of bergs falling off, often crushing vessels like nut-shells, it's generally the poor prisoners inside, stamping about to keep themselves warm, that do it."

Did Harry fall asleep again without knowing it? or how else was it that in another moment, as it seemed, he heard Calorica say:

"We are safely back again, Harry!"

They were actually standing in the Fairy Garden once more, and his three sisters ran up to greet him affectionately.

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THE DECISIONS.

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THE DECISIONS.

"The treasures of air;
Of earth, and sea, shall lie at your feet,
Whatever in fancy's eye looks fair,
Or in hope's sweet music sounds most sweet,
Bright flowers shall bloom where'er we rove,
A voice divine shall talk in each stream,
The stars shall look like worlds of love,
And earth shall be one beautiful dream."—*Moore.*

PERPLEXING it certainly was, for all the three girls addressed Harry at once, relating their own adventures, and inquiring about his, simultaneously.

The three Princes and Calorica stood silently listening to the eager chattering; but a pause soon occurred, for merry young voices were heard approaching, and a pretty procession came up the brook. First, on a water-lily—no doubt in compliment to the human Lily—came Fayel, waving a bunch of flowers in one hand, and carrying in the other a rose-wreathed mast and sail, which sent the flower-boat gliding gently on, and drawing after it a similar flower, down

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in the cup of which sat Lily herself in great state and dignity.

Then came an exquisite miniature schooner of mother-of-pearl, with gossamer sails and rigging, all complete, and at her helm Geoffrey proudly stood with Elfine beside him, and, judging from the boy's face, the Fairy schooner was considered to be an immense success. The four children landed and the gathering was complete.

Mossiefern's expression was very grave and his face pale and anxious, as, after a short pause, he signed to Calorica to speak, which she did seriously and with an earnestness very different from her usual airy manner.

"The crisis of your fate is now come, and you must decide—each one of you separately—on your future; whether you will once more become mortal children, and replace your doubles at home, or whether you will remain Fairies, assume our nature, and bidding adieu to the world of human life, remain for ever Fairies in Fairyland.

"You have each had some experience now of what your lives would be, and you must make your decision without delay. I think it right to tell you that though, according to your mortal time, you are each only one year older, if you become Fairies, a great change will take place as to your age and feelings.

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"You, Violet, would at once attain womanhood—you would leave your childish nature entirely behind, and possess the character, thought, and feelings of a true-hearted woman. You, also, Beatrice, will experience this change according to your disposition, since it will not in any way affect your individuality or freedom of thought and action. Nina and the two little ones will remain children for some time longer.

"Now, I have explained all that is necessary, and I will begin with the youngest. Lily! do you wish to return to your mortal life, or remain a Fairy among us?"

"Oh, a Fairy, please!" said she without a moment's hesitation, while little Fayel put his arms round her, and gave her an enthusiastic hug, exclaiming:

"Oh! what lots of fun we shall have together now!"

Calorica lifted Lily up, and kissed her very affectionately, then turned to the little brother.

"Geoffrey! what do you say?"

The boy looked at his schooner, at his sisters, at Elfine, who stole her little hand coaxingly into his, then again at his vessel, and finally, after several minutes' grave deliberation, he said:

"I think I had much better remain here, for I'm sure I could never have such a jolly boat at home,

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and nobody's afraid of my drowning myself here, you see!"

Calorica kissed him too, and the four children ran merrily back to their pretty vessels.

"Nina! your turn has come!"

Aquarillo looked at her with a smile, as she answered:

"Oh! certainly, I'll be a Fairy! Everything is so delicious altogether, and no lessons at all!"

Calorica shook her head reprovingly at this, but Aquarillo said:

"She will be wiser by-and-by, dear sister."

"Beatrice, we wait for you!" continued the Princess.

"Oh, dear me! what a bore it is to be suddenly asked to make up one's mind in this way! I do so hate deciding anything! Let me see, I haven't talked to any dogs yet, and only one horse, and there are lots of animals besides that I should like to have a chat with, and there are the Dream-Fairies' picture-books to look at. Yes, I think, on the whole, I'll decide on being a Fairy, though I certainly don't feel as if I should like being quite grown-up; that's unpleasant!"

As she finished speaking, Ariel knelt to kiss her hand, with a look of the brightest pleasure.

"What's the matter with you?" inquired Beatrice,

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coolly regarding him ; " I don't see at all how it concerns you ! "

Ariel coloured, and resumed his former position, Calorica calling :

" Harry, what do *you* wish to do ? "

" Well, I think I'd better go back—though Fiammo is really an awfully jolly fellow."

" And I'm not, I presume?" laughed the Princess.

" Oh, you're pleasant enough — when you don't chaff a fellow too much ; only you're going to be married, and as you don't take the smallest interest in me, why I think I'll go home again," replied Harry, rather dejectedly.

The Princess here added insult to injury by patting his head, and saying " Poor fellow," quite kindly.

" And now, Violet, think well," said she, instantly resuming her earnest manner, " for much—very much —hangs on your answer."

The young girl's face looked grave and troubled, and Mossiefern's went paler yet, the hand that held his plumed cap, too, must have shaken, for the long white feather trembled visibly. Violet saw his entreating eyes fixed on her, though he neither spoke nor moved. She went up to him, saying frankly :

" You have been so *very* kind to me—still, it is such a difficult thing to decide for all one's future. You see, as I have always declared that I neither

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believed in nor liked Fairies, it would seem very inconsistent to become one myself, would it not?"

"Oh, never mind about what you used to think!" cried Beatrice; "stay, like the rest of us, and we'll promise not to chaff."

Violet took no notice of this speech, which savoured of a levity unbecoming to the occasion, and continued to address Mossiefern.

"It is more delightful than I can describe to be of so much use everywhere—so much more so than I could be as a mortal, certainly. But, if you please, before I quite decide, I should very much wish to see what my human self would become, say in ten years after the last look I had."

Silently Mossiefern placed the silver mirror in her hands, and Violet beheld the following picture: A railway-station, and a train just coming in; there were people young and old waiting on the platform, but two figures especially attracted her attention, those of a lady and gentleman, the latter of whom went down the train as it came slowly up, looking into all the carriages, while the former came the opposite way, towards Violet, similarly employed. She was tall, she was stout, and she wore spectacles, and though she had a most happy and contented look, poor Violet drew in her breath with a sort of gasp, as she gazed upon her human counterpart. Presently

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she started forward with a cry of pleasure to greet a small elderly lady, who was carefully descending from one of the carriages, and bestowed on her a most energetic embrace, during which the spectacles fell off.

That all was well with both was sufficiently shown by their beaming, happy faces, and the tall, stout young lady turned to call the gentleman's attention to the fact that the object of their search was found, while, as she did so, the picture faded away. Violet indignantly remarked:

"If my mother can be contented with that great uninteresting creature,—in spectacles too," added she with a slight shudder, "I don't see much use in going home. I never would have believed that my back could get such a width! And I decide on staying here!"

As she uttered the words, beautiful sounds seemed to fill the air, and a soft golden haze closed over them; then, at one point, the golden mist slowly lifted, and disclosed the lovely, stately form of Titania, the Fairy Queen.

Her beauty was far beyond that of earth; but it was not that, nor the graceful majesty of her bearing, nor the dazzling splendour of her garments, which at once impressed Violet with a mingled sensation of awe and affection. It was the wonderful expression

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of her face, in which indescribable sweetness and dignity were blended, making it irresistibly attractive. With a smile that seemed to shine straight into the heart, the Queen called Violet to her, and placing her hands upon her head, tenderly kissed her forehead, saying:

"Take on you, from this time forth, our Fairy nature; be as one of us, and let anger, care, and grief die in your breast for ever."

As the musical tones of the Queen's voice ceased, the golden haze lifted entirely. Harry was gone, and Violet and her sisters gazed upon the unequalled loveliness of Fairyland. Beautiful landscapes, graceful palaces, the song of birds, the perfume of flowers, delighted every sense.

No less marvellous was the inner change predicted by Calorica, that took place in Violet herself. She was suddenly a woman, and it was with a start, a vivid blush, and a whirl of new sensations, that she, for the first time, read aright the story that Mossiefern's dark eyes were eloquently telling. For now that she could understand, she was to be called upon to make one more decision.

Before long Mossiefern, his face radiant with proud delight, led Violet to the Queen to receive her sanction. They would have knelt, but Titania held Violet fondly in her arms, saying:

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"Welcome, sweet daughter mine! My sweetest hope, and my son's one dream of happiness, are now fulfilled."

"Ah, gracious Madam! your *son?*" exclaimed Violet.

"Your betrothed is Mossiefern, Prince-Royal of the Fairy Kingdom, and my eldest and well-beloved son!" answered the Queen, smiling.

"Oh, Mossiefern! Why did you not tell me? I guessed there was some mystery, but I never could have imagined this!" said the girl, bewildered.

"Mine own!" tenderly answered Mossiefern, "you cannot wonder that I wished to gain your love when you knew nothing of my rank, that I might proudly feel you loved me for myself alone. Surely you can forgive and sympathise with the wish?"

"I am glad that you did so now," answered she, "for I should have been so frightened if I had known who you really were."

"And now, sweet daughter!" said the Queen, "new duties, and new honours, await you."

Violet looked at first a little alarmed, but Mossiefern placed her hand upon his arm, and whispering something in her ear, she turned to receive the Queen's commands, with a smile of happy confidence.

Titania waved her sceptre, a loud burst of triumphant music filled the air, and a gorgeous

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procession advanced, formed of hundreds of Fairies, each representing some flower, which crowned their heads, and waved as a wand in their hands. They came dancing up, and formed a great semicircle round Mossiefern and Violet. Then came a band of heralds in cloth-of-gold, preceding a deputation of beautiful Flower-Nymphs, who softly laid at her feet a crown of white violets, each flower cut from a single diamond, and surely never was the brow of earthly queen adorned with so fair a diadem.

Then, half frightened, but intensely happy, Violet was crowned Queen of the Flowers by Titania; and as the brilliant chaplet was placed upon her head, the sweet voices of the Flower-Nymphs rang out in the following chorus of welcome, to which she listened with a strange pride and pleasure:

"Hail to thee, our sov'reign fair,
Hail to thee, our Prince's bride,
Over earth and through the air,
Rings thy welcome far and wide!
Hail, gentle Queen!

"Sweet, and young, and fair thou art,
Violet, new Queen of Flowers;
Reign supreme in one fond heart,
Reign for ever, too, in ours!
Hail, gentle Queen!"

Long and loud were the acclamations which greeted the young Queen, as Mossiefern led her along

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the ranks of her beautiful subjects, and wondrous melody seemed suddenly to rain down from the sky, to echo from the woods, to pour from the glancing river. Violet knew the sounds again. They were what she had heard once before, on Midsummer Eve. She looked at Mossiefern, and her heart beat quickly as he whispered:

"Dost thou remember? On one other occasion —the marriage of the Queen's eldest son — those sounds were to be heard, and thou wilt have thy wish, thou wilt be present, sweetheart!"

Violet blushed brightly as she suddenly recalled her own earnest entreaty to be allowed to witness the ceremony, and the strangely wrong conclusions she had drawn from Mossiefern's embarrassed manner in replying to it. After a long pause, she said:

"It seems all so wonderful and strange! But where are my sisters? What will they think of it?"

Some considerable time had certainly elapsed since any thought of her sisters had troubled the Flower Queen's mind, and her conscience rather pricked her in consequence.

While Violet and Mossiefern had been conversing with each other, Titania had received, welcomed, and bestowed the Fairy nature on the four younger ones, and they experienced, in different degrees, the same change outwardly and inwardly.

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Beatrice stood in speechless amazement, but when she saw Mossiefern lead Violet back to the Queen, a sudden revelation seemed to dawn upon her.

"You don't mean to say," cried she, turning fiercely to poor Ariel, who was looking anxious and nervous, "that that sister of mine is going to marry Mossiefern?"

Ariel timidly replied in the affirmative, whereupon Beatrice continued in her severest manner:

"I'm perfectly ashamed of her! I used to consider Violet rather a sensible sort of girl, as girls go; and what a dreadful thing it is to be so disappointed in one's own sister!"

Here Ariel ventured on taking her hand, and said, in a low tone of suppressed feeling:

"Pray do not speak in that manner! It is such pain to me, for it destroys my courage, when I would fain plead my own cause."

"Plead your——; why, you don't absolutely mean to say," exclaimed Beatrice, sternly confronting him, "that you actually thought of——"

"Entreating you to make me as happy as Violet has made my brother," interrupted Ariel, in desperation, and kneeling before her.

"Young man, get up! I'm perfectly astonished to find that you don't yet know me well enough to be aware that there's nothing I detest so much as this sort of folly!"

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"Beatrice! you are terribly cruel! May I not indulge in even a *little* hope?"

"Certainly not!" replied she promptly. "I wish to go about among the dogs and horses, who will talk *sense*, which I shall regard as a pleasing contrast to your present style of conversation!"

"But you can't possibly travel about alone!" cried Ariel.

"Can't I—why not?"

"You are grown-up now, and a Princess; it would not be proper."

"Oh, what a horrid sell—annoyance, I mean," said she, with a sudden recollection that she ought to be on her dignity, and her face becoming several degrees longer; "I suppose you will have to come with me then."

"Only—on account of both these reasons—I must no longer take charge of you, unless you give me the right to do so. As my wife, I might take you anywhere."

Beatrice sat down, and contemplated him steadily for some seconds.

"Now, Ariel—no humbug—is that really true?"

"On my honour as a Prince, and a gentleman, it is," declared he, a gleam of hope overspreading his features.

"So you want me to marry you in the light of a kind of free ticket to everywhere?"

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This certainly was not the view which Ariel had hoped she would take of him, but he felt silence was the safest course, and Beatrice presently continued:

"What a shocking nuisance! And I must and will go about among the animals. 'Of two evils choose the least'—I wonder if you're the least? Now, look here, if I consent to marry you (no—go away—don't come any nearer!), will you take your solemn davy—no, promise on your honour I mean—never to address a single affectionate word to me, and never once to look at me in the absurd way you are doing now?"

Ariel's face grew exceedingly blank at these somewhat original conditions; but, after a short hesitation, he replied:

"I will certainly promise to try and please you."

"Very well, then," cried she, jumping up, "then it's a bargain—you may shake hands with me, if you like—and we'll consider it settled."

At this moment the chorus of the Flower-Nymphs was heard, and Beatrice quite forgot all about her affianced husband in her curiosity respecting her sister.

"Oh, Violet! are you really Queen of Flowers? They will be so glad to have you, poor things! and mind you sit upon the nettles! I mean, keep them in order. And what a scrumptious crown you have. It's perfectly splendid!"

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Mossiefern here astonished her by taking her hand, gently kissing her forehead, and observing slyly:

"So I find you are to be *doubly* my little sister?"

"What do you mean? Oh, good gracious! So I am! I quite forgot, only I've made him promise never to worry me."

"Dear Beatrice, I am so glad!" said Violet, earnestly.

"Well, that's more than I am; it's hard lines, *I* think. Why that scrap Nina will be led into some such folly before long!"

"Not just yet, however," said Mossiefern, smiling.

Nina and Aquarillo joined the party at this moment, and both warmly congratulated the new Queen, and Ariel whispering something in Nina's ear, she turned to her sister, exclaiming in the utmost astonishment:

"Why, Beatrice! you going to be married! What a funny idea!"

The young lady thus addressed looked daggers at her intended, and remarked savagely:

"I do wish you'd mind your own business!"

Even a worm will turn at last, so Ariel replied:

"You don't mean to say, when I'm going to be married, that it *isn't* my business, surely!"

And Beatrice, for once in her life, was fairly silenced. The wonderful music that now came from all sides, as the various Fairy bands drew near, occupied everyone's attention.

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The group of Dream-Fairies looked very lovely as they flew down, their golden harps sounding sweetly as they came, and Beatrice ardently desired to box her own Dream-Fairy's ears for bestowing a most knowing look upon her.

Then came a train of graceful woodland Elves, headed, of course, by Tripaway and Bluette, the latter's face radiant with delight, as she glanced from time to time at her spouse—for was it not proved that she was right after all? Mossiefern and Violet greeted the worthy couple with marked favour—to their proud delight—and Bluette retired, saying:

"Well, Tripaway, perhaps you'll believe me another time! Why, a child might have seen what was coming!"

Tripaway, not feeling himself in a position to respond with advantage, wisely held his tongue.

Then came a troop of lovely Water-Sprites, and Nina was delighted to see the fair, dignified face of Lurline, who smiled kindly at her eager apologies for leaving so unceremoniously, the child adding entreatingly:

"You will let me come and see you, and hear the fountain sing the Rhine legends, won't you?"

Lurline assented readily, and Nina felt that there was, indeed, a delightful treat to look forward to.

Last of all the glittering bands came a magnificent

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procession—the Gnomes escorting the Fire-King. They literally blazed with jewels, and the majestic noble-looking figure of their monarch impressed every one. Titania went forward to greet him most cordially, and Calorica's welcome may be imagined.

Beatrice beheld her old friend Carbon at the head of the Gnomes—no longer grimy—but with his velvet tunic gorgeous with gold and gems. She went up to him directly, saying:

"Oh, you nice old thing! I'm so glad to see you again, and you'll enjoy another talk with me, I know! What a swell get-up! I should hardly have known you!

The Gnome-Chief certainly came nearer looking pleasant—at this moment—than he had ever done in his life; but Beatrice's cool audacity was irresistible.

The stately Fire-King incurred her serious disapprobation by walking with Calorica, and bending tenderly over her as he spoke. By-and-by he came up and warmly congratulated the new Queen of Flowers, and to Beatrice expressed his pleasure at the prospect of their soon being nearly connected. The young lady did not seem grateful, for as soon as he had gone on, she remarked:

"Carbon! I like you much the best of them all. You're an original; and what's more, you're not spoony on anybody that I know of, which all the rest

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of them seem to be; and I find it extremely trying, I can assure you."

But Ariel was beginning to profit by experience, and took no notice of this speech beyond a cheerful smile, so that Beatrice felt quite disappointed.

All Fairy beings of earth, sea, sky, rivers, and woods were assembled now, and the whole air was one vibration of exquisite melody. Then Titania came forward, shrouded at first in the golden mist, which rolled back and left her beautiful form, set, as it were, in a framework of golden clouds.

When the tremendous acclamations from this vast concourse of her subjects, which greeted her appearance, had subsided, she called to Mossiefern and Violet, who knelt as she laid her hands on their heads and pronounced them to be man and wife. Very few and very simple were her words, but Violet never forgot them:

"Go forth; do good to every living thing that needs your help, and let the doing of it constitute your chief delight."

Next came the Fire-King and Calorica, and to her daughter she said:

"It will be your part to smooth and soften rugged natures. Let your own gentleness teach the best lesson."

Lastly came Beatrice and Ariel. Each of the

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others had led his bride by the hand, but Beatrice marched along quite independently, her head well up, and with a slightly defiant expression, which brought an amused smile to the face of the Queen, who, seeing Ariel's puzzled countenance, said, encouragingly:

"The change to Fairy nature has not quite done away with the characteristics of the human child. You, my son, must do your best, and we are, at any rate, sure that the animals will be taken good care of now. I have consulted the Prince-Royal, and he gladly confirms your appointment as Queen-Regent of the animals. I had intended assigning you the same post as regards the Dream-Fairies; but I have every reason to believe you would prefer the present arrangement."

"I thank your Majesty so much! To have the care of all the animals is just what I should like best! And I should not know what to do with the Dream-Fairies—silly little things!"

The latter part of this speech was intended to punish her own Dream-Fairy—who was listening—and Beatrice's heart smote her immediately, for the poor thing looked ready to cry at the hopelessness of getting any romance or sentiment out of her former charge.

Then Beatrice was startled by Ariel's suddenly taking her arm, and before she recovered sufficient

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presence of mind to rebel, they were following the two other couples down the long avenue, formed of the densely-packed crowds of Fairy beings, whose every voice was raised in joyous greeting.

Cap in hand, each Prince passed on with his bride, bowing right and left; and many and loud were the commendations bestowed on the sweet manners of the young Queens of Fire and Flowers—not quite so many falling to the share of Ariel's bride, whose independent bearing caused Bluette to remark with some asperity, that "Her ways are higher than I care to see, and she's so much younger, besides!"

But Bluette did her injustice, for under that defiant exterior was hidden a truly warm and tender heart, which Ariel and all the animals would have lovingly vouched for, many a long day after!

Nina, Aquarillo, and the four little ones were in a state of delighted excitement at the beautiful scene, and watched with breathless interest the departure of the newly-married couples.

The Fire-King handed his Queen into a magnificent chariot of gold studded with rubies, drawn by a pair of winged griffins.

For Beatrice descended the crystal bell she had enjoyed so much before; but with a saucy glance at Ariel, she spread her own white wings, and then soar-

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ing up and away through the air, she left her ill-treated bridegroom to follow as he pleased.

Mossiefern and his bride had a car woven entirely of sweet-scented leaves and flowers, garlanded with violets; and they had not floated far on their way, when the young Queen said insinuatingly:

"Mossiefern, I'm sure you won't deny me just one thing?"

Of course Mossiefern's reply could only be acquiescent, so the coaxing voice added:

"Then, you won't mind now, letting me see who it is that my Double will marry?"

The mirror was placed in her hand, and Violet looked upon a very sweet and happy picture.

Her human self was seated on a low stool by the side of a gentleman who was reading aloud. He put down the book to reply to some inquiry of hers, and Violet saw his face fully revealed. She started slightly, and seemed almost to hold her breath, so intently did she look upon the vision of the young, earnest face upturned to meet the loving smile and the hand laid gently on her hair. And it may be that it was needed—the touch of that tender, steadying hand—for the little head was wont to be somewhat wilful.

There was a light above and beyond the mere enjoyment of this world's happiness, that rested on the two faces and hallowed them.

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Violet put the mirror down, saying softly as she did so, "How truly happy they are!"

And there, as concerns the human Violet, we will leave them, with the assurance that, though their lives are strangely different, still the Flower-Queen and her human counterpart are one and the same in the wish to lead an earnest useful life. To do their duty faithfully and loyally is the chief desire that animates the two whose outward circumstances are so utterly dissimilar.

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